Re-Constructing Revolution: the Mediation of the Political Meaning(s) of *The Battle of Algiers* in American Art-Cinema Markets

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ABSTRACT

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Kaitlyn Zozula

This study explores the American promotion and reception of *The Battle of Algiers* (1966, dir. Gillo Pontecorvo). By outlining the discourses which facilitated *The Battle of Algiers'* circulation within American film-markets, this research outlines the distinct and varied ideological functions that the film has served in the United States. It focuses on three inter-related discursive issues which characterized the marketing campaigns and review journalism associated with the film. First, by de-emphasizing the roles that the Algerian state played in the film's production, and labelling the film as a piece of Italian neorealism, American distributors and critics promoted it as a politically-neutral alternative to propaganda. In doing so, they effectively mediated the film's anti-colonial politic, and carefully managed the imaged spectator's identification with Algerian nationalism(s). This research then explores the film's promotion as an (anti)colonial allegory for the Vietnam War and black-liberation movement. This discursive trend had varied results. At times it facilitated the articulation of anti-colonial critique within the American mainstream press. However, it more often worked to reify, obscure, and distort the on-the-ground realities of Third Worldist political organizing in ways which met, rather than resisted, the ideological imperatives of American imperialism. Ultimately, the film's American circulation can be characterized as a site of persistent and ongoing struggle between two competing visions of humanism and globalism - defined by either the internationalist ethos of anti-colonialism, or the expansionist aspirations of liberal capitalism.

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I would like to dedicate this work to the memory of my father, Doug Zozula.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Introduction

On September 7th, 2003 the *New York Times* published an article by Michael Kaufman detailing a now-infamous screening of *The Battle of Algiers* (1966, dir. Gillo Pontecorvo) hosted by the Pentagon. Occurring nearly six months into the second American invasion of Iraq, the screening was organized by the Directorate for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, a "civilian led group with 'responsibility for thinking aggressively and creatively' on issues of guerrilla war'" (Kaufman, WK3). According to the Pentagon, the event was meant to "prompt discussion" regarding the efficacy of counter-insurgency techniques used by the French military during the Algerian War of Independence, and more specifically, the use of torture as a method of interrogation (Kaufman, WK3).

The legacies of Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay suggest the horrific extent to which spectators at the Pentagon ultimately identified with the methods used by French soldiers in the film. However, beyond its apparently technical function, the screening constituted an important ideological intervention. The event was promoted amongst intelligence officers and military personnel with a memo which read:

> How to win a battle against terrorism and lose the war of ideas. Children shoot soldiers at point-blank range. Women plant bombs in cafes. Soon the entire Arab population builds to a mad fervor. Sound familiar? The French have a plan. It succeeds tactically, but fails strategically. To understand why, come to a rare showing of this film. (in Kaufman, WK3)

Within the interpretive framework promoted by the Pentagon, the FLN and Algerian people so vividly depicted in *The Battle of Algiers* are effectively stripped of their historical specificity and anti-colonial aspirations. The film chronicles an early chapter of the Algerian revolutionary struggle against French colonial occupation in which the FLN attempted to seize control of Algiers through a campaign of urban guerrilla warfare between November of 1954 and December of 1957 and concludes at the moment in which Algeria gained independence. However, in the

context of the Pentagon screening, the film's celebratory images of anti-colonial revolution were distorted into an ahistorical and Orientalist vision of the Arab world - yet another "Arab population" in "mad fervor" to be managed by empire.

This particular reconstruction of *The Battle of Algiers* was not limited to the Pentagon memo. The film was referenced in a US congressional hearing entitled "Preparing for the War on Terrorism", wherein Christopher Harmon, a professor at the U.S. Marine Corps Command and Staff College claimed that al-Qaeda "use a cell structure that has never been better explained publicly than in the famous film *The Battle of Algiers*" (in Daulatzai, 11). In an interview with ABC News, Richard Clarke former National Coordinator for Security, Infrastructure Protection and Counter-terrorism for the US government similarly asserted that, while *The Battle of Algiers* may have been set in the 1950s, "it's all happening now in the 21st century" (in Daulatzai, 11).

Nicholas Harrison has furthermore outlined the extent to which the construction of *The Battle of Algiers* as an allegory for the growing War on Terror, was reproduced within the contexts of both film journalism and academic film studies. In a dossier on the film released in 2004, *Cahiers du cinéma* claimed that *The Battle of Algiers* "attracts affectionate attention from supporters of radical Islam, who find in it, or believe they find in it, if not a set of instructions then at least some justification" (in Harrison, 23). Writing for *The Boston Review,* film critic Alan A. Stone suggested that "if Pontecorvo could now revisit his own film, he might recognize - as we can with the hindsight of 9/11 - the essential place of Islam in the film's setting and how that background context has now become its central message" (in Harrison, 25). B. Ruby Rich likewise claimed that "in today's content *The Battle of Algiers* has begun to look like a recruiting film for Al-Qaeda" (in Harrison, 25). This specific reading of *The Battle of Algiers* was also promoted by the Criterion Collection, who included interviews with "US counterterrorism experts" on their special edition DVD/Blu-Ray re-release of the film, who discussed its relevance to the contemporaneous War on Terror.

For many film and media scholars, this specific mobilization of the film constituted a gross misappropriation of a piece of radical political cinema.[1] Directed by an outspoken leftist

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[1] See: Baratieri, 2009; Chanan, 2007; Cló, 2008; Daulatzai, 2016; Dingeman, 2008; Gross, 2004; Haspel, 2006; O'Riley, 2011; Rich, 2015; Reid, 2005; Riegler, 2008; Riegler, 2009; Slocum, 2005; and Whitfield, 2012.

and produced with the financial and logistical support of the post-revolutionary Algerian state, the film was a product of Third Worldist internationalism, and an emblem of the global struggle for decolonization. Sohail Daulatzai perhaps offers the clearest articulation of the ideological conundrum posed by the Pentagon screening in his *Fifty Years of the Battle of Algiers: Past as Prologue.* Daulatzai asks:

> How could a film that was so sympathetic to the Algerians - evocatively and poetically showing them organizing, targeting French occupation forces, and planting bombs in cafés and other public places - come to the service of the most powerful empire in the history of the world fifty years after it was released? (12)

For Daulatzai, and many other scholars who have attempted to account for the film's complex political afterlife during the War on Terror, the answer was located in the film-text itself. *The Battle of Algiers* has been regularly described as a text which is open to multiple and conflicting political readings.[2] For Daulatzai, the film "has always been a battleground for competing ideas about power and politics at different historical junctures and in varying places around the globe", in part because of "the diverse sympathies it has engendered and the sheer range of interests that have identified with the film from across the political spectrum" (12)

This openness of the film text has furthermore routinely been understood as a product of the film's unprecedented realism and the fact that its production occurred in such proximity to the historical realities of the Algerian war. The film was co-produced and co-written by Saadi Yacef who was an active member of the FLN during and after the revolution.[3] Shot on location in Algiers only three years after the nation was liberated, and produced with the financial and logistical support of the post-revolutionary Algerian government, the film employed many non-professional actors and production staff who had experienced the revolution first-hand. For many scholars, these qualities of the film's production have imbued it with a heightened degree of

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[2] Caviglia, 2018; Chanan, 2007; Cilento, 2018; Haspel, 2006; O'Riley, 2011; Riegler, 2008; Riegler, 2009; Shohat and Stam, 2014; and Virtue, 2014.

[3] Saadi Yacef remains an active member of the Algerian government, as a senator in Algeria's Council of the Nation.

cinematic realism.[4] Indeed in her 1973, *Filmguide to the Battle of Algiers*, Joan Mellen suggested that "perhaps no other film in the history of the art has shown so […] minutely the delicate workings of a revolutionary organization" (68).

Since the film's Pentagon screening, many scholars have asserted the extent to which this pronounced sense of cinematic realism, has catalyzed a complex history of circulation, in which the film has been routinely used as a teaching tool within both the clandestine networks of revolutionary political organizations, and the military infrastructures of imperialist states. Several critics have claimed that the film has been studied by a range of militant anti-colonial political organizations, including the Black Panthers, the Weatherman, the Red Army Faction, the Tamil Tigers, the Irish Republican Army, and the Palestinian Liberation Organization.[5] Furthermore, alongside the Pentagon screening, several scholars have described the film's mobilization by imperialist states in the context of the Vietnam War, the Dirty Wars, and the Israeli occupation of Palestine.[6] Indeed, this specific narrative regarding *The Battle of Algiers'* global legacy, in which the film is framed primarily in terms of its history of circulation within either the clandestine networks of revolutionary political organizations, or the intelligence infrastructures of state power, has been more or less cemented in the scholarly research produced on the film since the Pentagon screening.

It should be clearly stated that this specific history of circulation within both militant and military media networks is an important component of the film's legacy - one which can indeed offer insight into its troubling uptake by the Pentagon in the context of the War of Terror. However, a survey of the scholarly work that has been produced on the film's cultural and political history reveals some glaring omissions regarding its more banal, but undoubtedly still relevant, circulation within global art-cinema markets.

In the American context alone, *The Battle of Algiers* has received over four waves of

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[4] Bignardi, 2000; Baratieri, 2009; Chanan, 2007; Cilento, 2018; Daulatzai, 2016; Hediger, 2018; Riegler, 2008; Riegler, 2009; Virtue, 2014; O'Leary and Srivastava, 2009; and Pauly, 1993.

[5] Bignardi, 2000; Baratieri, 2009; Chanan, 2007; Cilento, 2018; Crowdus, 2004; Daulatzai, 2016 Hediger, 2018; Riegler, 2008; Riegler, 2009; Virtue, 2014; O'Leary and Srivasatava, 2009; and Pauly, 1993.

[6] Chanan, 2007; Cilento, 2018; Daulatzai, 2016; Hediger, 2018; Riegler, 2008; Riegler 2009; Virtue, 2014; and Whitfield, 2012.

nation-wide theatrical release, two rounds of distribution on pay-cable programming in 1980 and 1981, and been bought and sold as part of a Criterion Collection DVD/Blu-Ray box set since 2004. It has been nominated for three Academy Awards, and been recognized by the American Film Critics Society, the Independent Film Importers and Distributors of America, and the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures. Indeed, *The Battle of Algiers* has perhaps been the most commercially-successful and widely-distributed film about anti-colonial revolution to be distributed in the United States.

This pronounced visibility of the film within Euro-American art-cinema markets has been noted by many scholars, including Mark Betz, who has labelled the film as the "key-reference text" on the Algerian War of Independence within Anglo-American film studies (107).[7] The film's heightened visibility has moreover been problematized by some scholars of Algerian and other Arab-world cinemas.[8] In her survey of cinema from the Maghreb, Suzanne Gauch noted that, "rather than representing the first step in the emergence of a national cinema, an international opening for Algerian filmmakers, as its producers had intended, Pontecorvo's film was widely seen as the epitome of Algerian cinema", one which was "fetishized as [the] national narrative" of Algeria on an international scale (4). For Kay Dickinson, this relative invisibility of Algerian cinema on in international scale is reflective of the global status of cinema from the Arab world. Dickinson writes: "there exists an absolute paucity of Arab films available to us in everyday screening spaces across the world or with subtitles in any other language" (6).

However, despite these important interventions, *The Battle of Algiers'* lifecycle as a commodity circulating within American art-cinema markets, and the process by which it has become canonized within Euro-American film cultures, has been broadly overlooked within scholarly analyses of the film's political legacy. If *The Battle of Algiers* is indeed open to multiple, and even diverging political readings, and furthermore if it stands as one of the most culturally visible films about anti-colonial revolution in the American context, how have American art-cinema industries, as representatives of a diverse range of institutional, cultural, and

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[7] See Aty, 2016; Boudjedra, 1995; Dickinson, 2018; Guy, 2012; Hafez, 1995; Hartog, et al, 1976; and Khanna, 1998.

[8] Rhanna Khanna concludes her analysis of the film with a post-script that problematizes the fact that the film remains one of the "most easily available images of Algeria within the [United States]" alongside "colonialist cinema", *The Colonial Harem,* and "news reports concerning Algerian Islamic fundamentalism" (29).

private-sector interests, mediated the film's potential political meanings? And what can this history tell us about the film's troubling afterlife in the context of the War on Terror?

Literature Review: Third Cinema, Auteurism, and Textual Analysis

In many ways, the scholarly consensus which frames the Pentagon screening primarily as an act of appropriation relies on the idea that the film initially functioned as a piece of what Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino described as "Third Cinema". Indeed, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino's concept of "Third Cinema" has perhaps been the paradigmatic theoretical framework for English-language scholarship on *The Battle of Algiers.* The vast majority of academic writing that has been produced on the film has been dedicated measuring the degree to which *The Battle of Algiers* either subverts or affirms neocolonial logic, and thus serves either a liberatory or oppressive political function. In many instances, the film has been explicitly read according to the ideas in Fernando Solanas and Octavio Gentino's "Towards a Third Cinema".[9] In these texts, the authors attempt to articulate the film's relationship to the categories of First (commercial), Second (art-house and/or auteurist) and the notion of a resistant, anti-colonial, and anti-capitalist "Third Cinema". While there is significant body of English-language scholarship on the film that does not explicitly engage with Solanas and Getino's essay, the majority of this research also primarily hinges on an analysis of the film's anti-colonial politic. As such it still speaks to the notion of Third Cinema on an implicit level.

In both bodies of work, the political meanings and functions of *The Battle of Algiers* are generally analyzed according to three interrelated forms of evidence. Namely, the film's mode and contexts of production, the intentions of its various authors, and the aesthetic and narrative strategies of embedded within the film-text itself. On the level of textual analysis, the film has been read according to its: aesthetic and formal relationship to Italian neorealism (Bâ, 2012; Bondanella, 2009; Forgacs, 2007; Rich, 2015; and Virtue, 2014); representation of women (Aty, 2016, Bâ, 2012; Baratieri, 2009; Khanna, 1998; Moore, 2003 Moruzzi, 1993; Roberts, 2007; and Shohat and Stam, 1994); use of music (Cilento, 2018; Daulauzai, 2016; Mellen, 1973; and

[9] See: Bâ 2012; Baratieri, 2009; Daulatzai, 2016; Eid and Ghazel, 2009; Gikandi, et al, 2011; Khanna, 1998; O'Riley, 2010; Virtue, 2014; Sainsbury, 1971; Shohat and Stam, 1994; and Wayne, 2001.

O'Shaghnessy, 2008); relationship to the ideas of Frantz Fanon (Cilento, 2018; Daulatzai, 2016; Eid and Ghazel, 2009; Moore, 2003; Moruzzi, 1993; O'Leary and Srivastava, 2009; Prochaska, 2003; Rich, 2015; Shohat and Stam, 2014; Stam, 1975; Stam, 2003; and Srivastava, 2009); use of pseudo-documentary aesthetics (Bondanella, 2009; Cilento, 2018; Dowd, 1969; Harrison, 2007; Mellen, 1973; O'Leary, 2018; Orlando, 2000; Pauly, 1993; Rich, 2015; Riegler, 2009; Sainsbury, 1971; Smith, 2005; and Virtue, 2014); relationship to post-colonial Algerian political history (Harrison, 2012; Prochaska, 2003; Smith, 2008); its politics of identification (Bâ, 2012; Caviglia, 2018; Daulatzai, 2018; Haspel, 2006; Mellen, 1973; O'Leary and Srivastava, 2009; Shohat and Stam, 1994; Smith, 2005; Smith, 2008; Stam, 1975; and Stam, 2003); representation of the historical realities of the Algerian War of Independence (Cilento, 2018; Forgacs, 2007; Harrison, 2007; Khanna, 1998; Mellen, 1973; Orlando, 2000; Rejali, 2012; Riegler, 2009; and Smith, 2008). Several scholars have furthermore analyzed the film's anti-colonial politic in relation to Pontecorvo's personal history and contextualized it within his broader *oeuvre* (Celli, 2005; Ghirelli, 1979; O'Leary and Srivastava, 2009; Riegler, 2009; Srivastava, 2005; Virtue, 2014; and Wilson, 1971). Others have engaged in analyses of the film's production history, and attempted to weigh the film's "Italianness" against its "Algerianess" by analyzing the respective degrees of authorial agency relegated to Pontecrovo, its screenwriter Franco Solanis, and/or Saadi Yacef (Bignardi, 2000; Cló, 2008; Daulatzai, 2016; Forgacs, 2007; Mellen, 1973; Riegler, 2008; Shohat and Stam, 1994; Smith, 2005; and Whitfield, 2012)

These methods of analysis have undoubtedly made useful contributions to developing our shared understandings of the ways in which certain production methods or aesthetic, formal, or narrative strategies may work to subvert, or reproduce, imperialist ideologies. However, what has been broadly overlooked within the scholarly writing on *The Battle of Algiers* is the film's actual conditions of distribution and exhibition, and how the various institutions that have facilitated the film's global circulation have inflected *The Battle of Algiers* with specific, and indeed varied, meanings. Indeed, many scholars who have engaged in textual or auteurist analyses of the film have remarked upon the film's complex and contradictory reception history. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam have asserted that "*The Battle of Algiers* offers a particularly vivid example of the ways that films are received differently over time as they are interpreted through different

national contexts and ideological grids" (404). Similarly, Michael Chanan has suggested that the film "will be read according to the political culture of the audience that watches it" (40). As such, perhaps one of the most valuable, and indeed under-studied, aspects of *The Battle of Algiers* is the knowledge its history of distribution, exhibition, and reception can provide about the ideological contours of the various culture industries in which it has circulated.

Specific aspects of the film's reception history have of course been studied. As previously mentioned, several scholars have engaged in overviews of the film's reception within both militant and military media networks (Chanan, 2007; Clò, 2008; Daulatzai, 2016; Gross, 2004; Hediger, 2018; Whitfield, 2012; Riegler, 2008; Riegler, 2009). The film's French reception, and its relationship to broader social memories regarding the Algerian War, has also been extensively researched (Caillé, 2007; Cilento, 2018; Dine, 1994; Harries, 2007; Hugo, 2014; McCormack, 2011; Orlando, 2000; Reid, 2005; Stora and Stevens, 2007). Many scholars have contextualized the film within Algerian national cinema and reflected on its cultural and social impacts in the Algerian context (Aty, 2016; Boudjedra, 1995; Dickinson, 2018; Guy, 2012; Hafez, 1995; Hartog, et al, 1976; Khanna, 1998). Furthermore, there have been several analyses dedicated to the film's uptake as commentary on politicized Islam in the context of the War on Terror (Baratieri, 2009; Harrison, 2012; O'Riley, 2010; Slocum, 2005).

However, the film's entrance into and construction within American art-cinema markets has remained virtually ignored within the body of academic scholarship that has been produced on the film. While scholars have routinely contextualized *The Battle of Algiers* as a piece of Third Cinema, or asserted the general significance of the film's political impact, they often provide little to no elaboration on, or evidence to support, these claims. For example, Francesco Caviglia introduces his textual analysis of the film by stating that it "was understood by left-wing militants in the late 1960s and 70s as a clear endorsement or even glorification of political violence" (1). Caviglia does not specify which political organizations he is referring to, or even where these groups were thought to be located. Similarly, while Paul B. Rich suggests that upon release the film became "essential viewing for all those interested in radical or underground cinema", he does not elaborate on this specific aspect or the film's reception and exhibition history, and provides no evidence to support this claim (659). Despite the large body of scholarship that has

been produced on the film, it is apparent that *The Battle of Algiers'* global circulation remains under-historicized and subject to mystification.

Methodology

In order to address some of the gaps that currently exist in scholarship on *The Battle of Algiers,* I have elected to methodologically approach the film from the mode of reception studies employed by Barbara Klinger in *Melodrama and Meaning.* In this text, Barbara Klinger outlines the historical and social processes by which Douglas Sirk came to be "politically canonized" and historicized as a "subversive political auteur" working within the commercial system of Hollywood (Klinger, xiii). Klinger engages in detailed archival research, in which she performs comparative discourse analyses of large samples of marketing materials, and review journalism produced over the course of the American promotion of Sirk's films in multiple historical periods. By comparing the different ways in which Sirk's films have been constructed in institutional and commercial contexts, Klinger exposes the multiple and shifting "ideological identities" of Sirk's films and the broader historical and social processes that these identities reflect (xiiii). Klinger asserts that the canonization of Sirk's films as "politically subversive" by many academics and cultural critics relies on an altogether over-simplistic causal relationship between interpretations of a film's textual politics and the meaning and political function of the film-text (xiii). Through archival research, Klinger "seeks to provide a stronger historical dimension to questions of the relationship between [film-text] and ideology" by "recognizing the role external social and historical factors play in negotiating the cultural politics of [a film]" and the historical "variability" of these political meanings (xii). Rather than attempting to discern the true ideological "meaning" of the text, or, inversely, conclude that the text has no coherent meaning or ideological function, Klinger seeks to outline the ways in which Sirk's films "…have been subject at every cultural turn to the particular *uses* to which various institutions and social circumstances [have] put them" (159)

Following Klinger's methodological impulses, this research will describe some of the different "ideological identities" that have been ascribed to *The Battle of Algiers* over the course of its circulation and "political canonization" within American art-cinema markets. Focusing on

the film's initial waves of American release, I have collected a range of materials that buttressed its promotion and reception. These materials include: articles about the film which circulated in the American trade press; campaign manuals, press-releases, and posters produced by Allied Artists for the film's American distribution; the screening notes for the film's premiere at the 1967 New York Film Festival; and a large sampling of reviews and advertisements for the film that were published in the American popular press. These materials have been analyzed in an effort to outline the means by which the film was introduced to and constructed for American audiences over the course of the film's American circulation in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Through comparative discourse analysis of this large selection of promotional materials and review journalism, I have revealed that distributors and critics encouraged American spectators to read *The Battle of Algiers* according to a series of specific protocols of interpretation. I have organized my analysis of these protocols into three chapters, each of which deals with a specific discursive trend which characterized the film's American promotion and reception. In each chapter, I have furthermore contextualized the discursive trends outlined within the contemporaneous American geopolitical landscape.

The first chapter explores the ways in which the film was initially promoted to American audiences as a piece of Italian neorealism. By de-emphasizing the Algerian involvement in the film's production and promoting the film as an auteurist achievement of cinematic realism, American distributors positioned the film as an artful, and politically neutral alternative to political propaganda. This promotional strategy furthermore hinged on a protocol of interpretation which promoted readings of the film as an indictment of violence "on both sides" of the Algerian war. As such, American distributors and critics effectively mediated the film's anti-colonial politic, and carefully managed the imagined American spectator's relationship to Algerian nationalisms. I then contextualize these discourses within contemporaneous Algerian-American relations, and the historical realities of the Algerian War of Independence.

My second and third chapters explore the ways in which American distributors and film critics encouraged American audiences to read *The Battle of Algiers* as an allegory for some of America's own imperialist projects. The second chapter explores the film's promotion and reception in the context of the Vietnam War. It is apparent that over the course of the film's initial

waves of American circulation, distributors encouraged American audiences to understand the film as a dramatization of the American invasion of Vietnam. While this specific protocol of interpretation allowed some critics to voice opposition to the war, more often than not, the "on both sides" protocols of interpretation was extended from the Algerian War of Independence to the Vietnam War, effectively policing the American spectator's ability to identify, or sympathize, with North Vietnamese nationalisms. I then contextualize these discursive trends within the broader American media landscape surrounding the Vietnam War itself and emphasize the extent to which *The Battle of Algiers* contributed to the ideological naturalization of the American invasion of Vietnam, and furthermore to the demonization of anti-war protest movements.

My third chapter explores the film's promotion in the context of the FBI's Counter-Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO), wherein the film was routinely constructed for American audiences as a source of knowledge on the contemporaneous black-liberation movement. Playing directly off of fears regarding a coming black-American insurrection, Allied Artists promoted the film as a "Blueprint for Revolution", and asserted that the film had been studied by militant black-nationalist political organizations like the Black Panther Party. The chapter contextualizes this specific aspect of the film's promotion within the broader media offensive against the Black Panther Party, and other black-nationalist organizations organized as part of COINTELPRO, asserting that in many ways the American distribution and reception of *The Battle of Algiers* worked in support of, rather than resistance to, the counter-intelligence initiatives against contemporaneous anti-colonial political movements. This chapter furthermore reflects on some of the problematic ways in which academic scholarship on *The Battle of Algiers* has effectively reproduced the distorted vision of the Black Panther Party's legacy, and the realities of the Third Worldist movement more broadly, that were promoted by the film's American distributors.

It should be clearly stated that my analysis of the discursive trends which characterized *The Battle of Algiers*' entry into, and initial waves of circulation within, American art-cinema markets does not necessarily tell us how American audiences reacted to or understood the film. Indeed, when possible I have attempted to describe how various political organizations engaged with and mobilized the film in ways which directly contradict some of the discursive trends that characterize the film's promotion and critical reception. However, as Karl Schoonover suggests,

an analysis of how films were promoted and critically received provides insight into "how a periods dominant discourses imagine reception, anticipate engagement, and in doing so, condition the sociopolitical remunerations of filmgoing" (71). As such, an analysis of the American promotion and critical reception of *The Battle of Algiers* helps to reveal how American culture industries have engaged with and constructed the historical realities of decolonization for American audiences.

Developing Third Cinema as a Critical Practice

Ultimately, while this methodological framework seeks to counter many of the discursive tendencies that have characterized scholarly writing on *The Battle of Algiers,* it also marks a return to some of the same fundamental theoretical concepts: namely, the notion of Third Cinema. However, this research will not approach Third Cinema as a system of taxonomy and categorization of films purely based on production methods or textual politics. Instead, I will look to Solanas and Getino's manifesto because it offers important theoretical insights into the potential geopolitical functions of art-cinema markets themselves. Rather than using this document to articulate a specific set of anti-imperialist textual politics, I will focus on some of the theoretical reflections it offers on issues of circulation, distribution, and exhibition, and how these forces may impact and shape a film's political meanings.

In doing so, I hope to respond to Mike Wayne's call to "develop" Third Cinema as a "critical practice" (2).Wayne suggests that "one of the curious deficiencies of Third cinema theory has been its underdevelopment *vis-à-vis* First cinema (dominant, mainstream) and Second (art, authorial) (2). For Wayne, "to develop Third cinema *theory* is to try and illuminate its relations with and what is at stake in the differences between First, Second, and Third Cinema" and their relationships to one another (2). However, while Wayne roots his contribution to this project in an attempt to "pinpoint" the interactions between these three categories of cinema in the film-text itself "at the level of textual analysis", this research will attempt to articulate the relationships between these three categories on the levels of distribution and exhibition.

A historical analysis of *The Battle of Algiers'* initial waves of American circulation, and the discourses that have been produced over the course of its promotion and reception in US art-

cinema markets, helps to elaborate on some of the complex ways in which the categories of First, Second, and Third cinema overlap in the contexts of distribution and exhibition. While *The Battle of Algiers* was undoubtedly produced as an expression of Algerian nationalism and anti-colonial internationalism, the potential political meanings that are embedded within the film-text itself have been drastically mediated by the various actors who have been involved in its screening in grassroots, institutional, and commercial contexts. Thus, regardless of whether or not one may classify the film as First, Second, or Third Cinema based on its textual politic, over the course of its circulation, the film has been exhibited in activist, institutional, and commercial contexts, and instrumentalized in the service of both Third Worldist and (neo)imperialist political projects. While many scholars have discussed this phenomena in relation to the Pentagon screening and understood it as an issue of appropriation, I will approach the problem of the film's political instrumentalization in the American context on a decidedly more structural level. By embracing the ethos of Third Cinema theory, I will analyze *The Battle of Algiers'* legacy of problematic political instrumentalization as a phenomenon that has been facilitated by and through the film's circulation and discursive construction within American art-cinema markets.

Many of the issues raised by *The Battle of Algiers'* American circulation elaborate on aspects of film distribution and exhibition that are outlined in "Towards a Third Cinema". On one hand, Solanas and Getino note the stakes of cross-cultural transfer and commodification. They write:

> The differences that exist between one and another liberation process make it impossible to lay down supposedly universal norms. A cinema which in the consumer society does not attain the level of the reality in which it moves can play a stimulating role in an underdeveloped country, just as a revolutionary cinema in the neocolonial situation will not necessarily be revolutionary if it is mechanically taken to the metropolitan country. (244)

Here, Solanas and Getino emphasize the relationship between contextual and textual cinematic meaning. They highlight the degree to which commercial networks of distribution within different geopolitical contexts, and especially those within the "consumer society", "metropolitan

country", or imperial core, may work to de- or re-politicize texts which serve revolutionary functions in other national contexts (244).

This reflection is particularly important to an analysis of *The Battle of Algiers'* American legacy. While the film was intended to generate solidarity with the post-revolutionary Algerian state on an international scale, the first chapter of this research reveals the extent to which American distributors and critics often constructed the film in terms which effectively distorted the realities of the Algerian War of Independence, marginalized issues of national sovereignty, and undermined the legitimacy of the post-revolutionary Algerian state. In order to enter American art-cinema markets, *The Battle of Algiers'* anti-colonial politic had to be mediated in the ideological service of post-war American expansionism. This history reveals the legitimacy of Solanas and Getino's hesitancy around establishing "universal norms" regarding a specific cinematic production's political functions. It also works to affirm some of their suspicions regarding the potential impacts that commercial routes of distribution may have on a film's ideological message.

Furthermore, in their theorization of the "film-act", Solanas and Getino emphasize the significant role that contexts of exhibition play in shaping the political meanings of a given film-text. They suggest that alongside "the ideological message" of the film-text itself, the political usefulness of the film-medium resides in its capacity to "offer an effective pretext for gathering an audience" (239). Here, the actual contexts of exhibition play an important role in shaping the spectator's relationship to the film-text, and thus the film's political meanings:

> …each projection of a film-act presupposes a different setting, since the space where it takes place, the materials that go to make it up (actors-participants), and the historic time in which it takes place are never the same. This means that the result of each projection act will depend on those who organize it, on those who participate in it, and on the time and place; the possibility of introducing variations, additions, and changes is unlimited. The screening of a film-act will always express in one way or another the historical situation in which it takes place.. (249)

The political function of "third cinema", then, is not wholly contained within the text itself or reducible to a particular set of aesthetic or narrative strategies. It is furthermore not exclusively tied to a particular mode of production. Alongside these criteria, the anti-imperialist function of Third Cinema is enacted by the particular ways in which the film-text is constructed for and presented to an audience of people, who function as the ultimate historical agents of revolution. Solanas and Getino's theorization of distribution networks and the "film-act" thus open up the possibilities of a single film-text producing multiple, and even divergent, ideological meanings or political functions, within the same historical context.

This notion of the "film-act" will become particularly relevant in the second and third chapters of this research. These chapters reveal that the film was indeed mobilized by various sectors of the American Third Worldist left over the course of its initial waves of circulation for explicitly anti-imperialist purposes. For many community and political organizations, *The Battle of Algiers* served as a useful teaching tool for garnering support for both the anti-war and black-liberation movements. However, over the course of this period, the film was simultaneously constructed by American distributors and film critics as a source of knowledge on these political movements themselves. Within its commercial contexts of exhibition, the film was promoted and reviewed in largely sensationalist and alarmist terms. These promotional strategies and protocols of interpretation resulted in the film functioning as a highly-visible cultural reference point which was routinely mobilized in the American news media's attempts to construct domestic anti-colonial and anti-imperialist political movements as alternately naive, irrational, and violence-prone.

Solanas and Getino's articulation of Third Cinema suggests that alongside textual politics, issues of film distribution, exhibition, and reception are integral to understanding a given film-text's ability to intervene in the ideological dynamics of imperialism. Indeed, it is not difficult to draw clear connections between the theoretical impulses of scholars like Barbara Klinger, who advocate for reception studies and more socio-historically situated modes of film and media studies, and Solanas and Getino's emphasis on "the cine-act" as the process by which films come to make meaning. A historical analysis of the initial waves of *The Battle of Algiers'* American distribution and reception will elaborate on Solanas and Getino's claims about the potential

effects that the "time-less" and "history-less" worlds of commodification and "bourgeois" art may have on a given film's anti-imperialist textual politic (241).

By outlining the discourses that have buttressed *The Battle of Algiers'* entrance and circulation within American film-markets, and furthermore its political canonization within American film-culture, this research will outline the distinct and varied ideological functions that the film has served in the American context. The films' initial waves of American distribution can be characterized by a persistent and ongoing struggle to define the film's meaning, and, by extension, to either confront or naturalize the realities of American imperialism. The readings promoted by American distributors and film critics routinely conflicted with the uses that the film was put to by anti-colonial political organizations, community groups, and cultural centres, and as such the film functioned as a site of discursive contestation. This research positions the film's American circulation as a site of struggle between two competing visions of humanism and globalism - one defined by internationalist ethos of anti-colonialism, and the other by the expansionist aspirations of liberal capitalism.

However, particular focus will be paid to the specific ways in which the film's American distributors and critics sought to construct its anti-colonial politic. I will furthermore regularly situate these discourses within the often symbiotic relationship that exists between private-sector commerce, news media, and imperial state power. In doing so, this research will elaborate on some of the ideological contours and geopolitical functions that have historically characterized American art-cinema industries themselves. In this way, I hope to contribute to the broader scholarly effort to understand the geopolitical dimensions of global art-cinema industries.[10] As transnational networks shaped by a mixture of commercial, institutional, and socio-cultural forces, art-cinema industries have played a significant role in facilitating the global circulation of images and ideas. However, it is simultaneously important to emphasize the degree to which the forms of inter-cultural exchange facilitated by global art-cinema industries have been shaped by the spatial, social, and economic power dynamics of both historical and contemporary imperialisms. As such, the analysis of the institutional, commercial, and cultural networks of

[10] See, for instance, Andrew, 2013; Betz, 2009; Dennison and Lim, 2006; Dickinson, 2016; Galt and Schoonover, 2010; Giovacchini and Skylar, 1997; Kötzing and Moine, 2017; Schoonover, 2012; Segrave, 2014; Tweedie, 2013; Wasson, 2005.

global art-cinema industries can "[expose] the otherwise unseen geopolitical fault lines" of an increasingly globalized capitalism, and the various socio-cultural realities it has produced (Galt and Schoonover, 3). This research will contribute to this body of scholarship by analyzing the specific terms by which the American art-cinema industry his historically mediated images of anti-colonial nationalisms for American audiences, and thus attempted to shape popular opinion on the geopolitical process of decolonization itself.

At the core of this project is a desire to unpack the potential functions that art-cinema networks have historically served in facilitating maintenance of, or resistance to, American imperialism - both economically and ideologically. I aim to reveal the commercial, geopolitical, and social processes that dictate the contours of Euro-American cinephilic cultures, and to contextualize the means by which "foreign" media has been distributed, exhibited, constructed, and historicized in the American cultural context. In this way, I am also seeking to contribute to the body of scholarship which has sought to outline the roles that cinematic technologies have played in establishing and maintaining American military and economic power. Lee Grieveson's *Cinema and the Wealth of Nations: Media, Capital, and the Liberal World System* stands as a significant example. In this text, Grieveson engages in in-depth historical research to analyze how film and media have been used by elite institutions to "establish and facilitate" a liberal and neo-colonial global economic system (5). I am similarly inspired by the theoretical prompt outlined in the Grieveson and Haidee Wasson's anthology *Cinema's Military Industrial Complex,* which elaborates on the various roles that cinema technologies have played in the development and maintenance of American military hegemony (2018). Following the leads established by these scholars, this research aspires to develop their specific concerns regarding American economic and military power with specific regard to art-cinema industries. As a key industrial infrastructure involved in the import, promotion, and exhibition of "foreign" media in the American context, what roles have art-cinema networks played in the maintenance of a highly-militarized global liberal political economy on both an ideological and industrial level?

It should be clearly stated that this research is not attempting to in anyway undermine the important political intervention that *The Battle of Algiers* represented. It is moreover not an indictment of the political strategies pursued by the various creative forces behind the film's

production, or an attempt to suggest that these actors should have done something differently. A great deal of criticism has already been produced which either implicitly or explicitly frames certain aspects of the film's aesthetic or narrative strategies, its methods of production, or the decision to distribute the film commercially, as political mistakes or shortcomings. Notwithstanding the undoubtedly legitimate and politically useful reflections that have been generated by this kind of criticism, this research shifts the focus, and indeed the onus of responsibility, away from the film's authorial agents, if only for a moment - be it Pontecorvo, Yacef, or the post-revolutionary Algerian state. As a vivid representation of colonial exploitation, anti-colonial resistance, organized political violence, and imperialist counter-insurgency, the American reception and promotion of *The Battle of Algiers* will function as a useful site of analysis for understanding the complex relationship between art-cinema industries, the cinephilic cultures they produce, and the ideological imperatives of either imperial state power or revolutionary dissent in different historical contexts. Ultimately this research will explore the questionable decisions, and indeed the social and political responsibilities, of the people who have imported, marketed, (re)-released, reviewed, researched, and historicized *The Battle of Algiers*, and thus substantially shaped the film's global impact.

Chapter One:
Propaganda or Neorealism? *The Battle of Algiers*' American Distribution and the Question of Algerian Nationalism

In this chapter, I will outline the discursive framework which buttressed *The Battle of Algiers*' entrance into, and initial circulation within, American film markets. Within this initial period of circulation, a promotional template was established which carefully mediated the relationship between the film's images of Algerian nationalism and the imagined American spectator. By framing the film as a piece of Italian neorealism, and actively distinguishing it as an artful, objective, and realistic alternative to political propaganda, American distributors and film critics established a set of promotional discourses and interpretive protocols which framed the film's images of anti-colonial revolution as pleas for extra-national adjudication. Within this paradigm, *The Battle of Algiers* was not so much framed as a rallying cry for Third Worldist or anti-colonial solidarity, but as a prompt for the American spectator to take up a decidedly ambivalent position regarding Algerian nationalism. In many ways, these promotional strategies and interpretive protocols reflected the American government's economic and diplomatic relationship with post-revolutionary Algeria. As such, an analysis of the marketing campaigns and review journalism which buttressed the film during this initial period of American circulation can help to reveal some of the ideological contours of the contemporaneous American film culture.

Algerian or Italian, Propaganda or Neorealism?

The Battle of Algiers was first mentioned in the American trade press directly after it premiered, and received the Golden Lion, at the 1966 Venice Film Festival. A review appearing in the September 7th, 1966 edition of *Variety* introduced the film to the American industry. As "the first feature film ever made in Algiers by Algerians", *The Battle of Algiers* was framed as a kind of promotional conundrum (Hawk, 6). The author described the film as, "a very special item due to theme and treatment, its sales points are political (with leftwing backing assured because of its paean to revolutions and revolutionaries) […] but it will need plenty of sell to move it into ampler fields" (6). American distributors subsequently took on this very task of marketing the film to the

"ampler fields" of audiences located outside the ideological confines of the left. In large part, this meant that they had to find a way to properly manage the film's relationship to Algerian nationalism, in terms of both the film's production history and its representation of anti-colonial revolution.

In practice, the impulse to mediate the film's images of and relationship to Algerian nationalism was articulated within the American trade press as a need to distance the film from the decidedly pejorative label of "propaganda". A 1967 *BoxOffice* article clearly articulated the problem the film posed for its American distributors, noting that "the [category] of political propaganda […] [has] not been [a] strong [draw] in the past", and as such, *The Battle of Algiers* has "a limited market and a severe obstacle to overcome" ("Foreign Language Feature Reviews", 10). Over the course of the film's American circulation, a variety of discursive strategies would be developed to reconstruct *The Battle of Algiers* as an artful alternative to political propaganda. These discourses promoted protocols of spectatorship and interpretation which profoundly mediated the film's anti-colonial politic for American audiences.

Perhaps the most straightforward way in which American distributors sought to distinguish the film from propaganda was by downplaying the roles that the Algerian state and co-producer and co-writer Saadi Yacef played in both the inception and production of the film. The aforementioned *Variety* and *BoxOffice* articles are some of the only references to *The Battle of Algiers* as an Algerian co-production in either the American trade or popular press until the mid-1970s.[11] While the film was credited as a co-production between Igor Films and Casbah Films in the program for the New York Film Festival, where the film made its American premiere in September of 1967, over the course of its subsequent waves of theatrical release, the Algerian

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[11] There are only four other instances in which the film's status as a co-production is discussed in the American trade or popular press. One is an article in the December 28th, 1966 edition of *Variety* in which the author discusses the French delegations' protest against film's premiere at the Venice Film Festival ("Hateful to France," 1966). The second appears in the August 30th, 1967 edition of *Variety,* in which the author notes that "although the credits in Venice called it the co-production of Musu's Igor Films and the Algerian Casbah Films, Musu makes a fine distinction between co-participation and coproduction", and that "at the time of filming [Musu] said Algeria had comparatively no film industry based on western standards." (Frederick, 18). The last mention of Algerian involvement in the film's production outside critic Howard Clurman's review for *The Nation* in which he suggests that the film "creates the impression of total objectivity", but asserts that "folks with a particular political bias will contradict this" before noting that "a partisan journalist told me that […] the Algerians had contributed not only their land but funds to the film's making" (348). Pauline Kael also noted that the film was an Algerian co-production in her 1973 review of the film for *The New Yorker* (208).

production company was left uncredited.[12] Saadi Yacef's role in developing the film's screenplay was also ignored in American markets. Yacef did not receive a writing credit in either the program notes of the New York Film Festival, or the Allied Artists campaign manual for the film.

American distributors furthermore mitigated the propaganda label by promoting the film through a dual emphasis on auteurism and cinematic realism. While the film was initially introduced to the American industry as a "feature made in Algiers by Algerians," over the course of its American circulation it was primarily constructed as the product of Pontecorvo's artistic genius. Within this context, the Algerian contribution to the film's production was primarily re-cast as a product of Pontecorvo's dedicated commitment to cinematic realism.

Indeed, the *BoxOffice* article anticipates the extent to which discourses of auteurism and cinematic realism could be used to effectively downplay the Algerianness of the film's production. The article notes that American "distributors […] are playing up the fact that there is no newsreel footage at all in this impressive recreation of Algiers' struggle for independence and that literally the whole city and its populace played themselves in the movie" (10).[13] While the large-scale recreations of public bombings, demonstrations, and military operations featured in the film were primarily facilitated through the logistical and infrastructural support offered by the Algerian state (which was furthermore primarily coordinated through Casbah Films), the *BoxOffice* article attributes them primarily to Pontecorvo's "masterful filmmaking", and his

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[12] Casbah Films is not credited in the 1968 campaign manuals produced for the film by Allied Artists. They are furthermore not mentioned in any of the promotional materials, press releases, review journalism, or academic film studies produced on the film from the period - as either a co-producer or "co-participant". In his research on the film's production history, David Forgacs has asserted that "the American print [of *The Battle of Algiers*] did not even mention Casbah Films or give a production credit to Yacef" (355). Forgacs has furthermore outlined the economic dimensions of Casbah Film's marginalization in the American distribution of the film. Forgacs outlines "a series of underhand moves by the US distributors and Igor Film" that took place over the course of *The Battle of Algiers'* American circulation, "whereby they effectively appropriated the film for themselves and pocketed earnings that should have accrued to Casbah Films" (355). He goes on to note that "these operations were eventually stopped when Casbah Films took legal action, as a result of which it was granted, in 1998, world distribution rights for the film in all territories apart from Italy, where Igor Films retained the rights" (356).

[13] Thus, the infamous and often-cited title card included in the film's opening credits, which assures audiences that "NOT ONE FOOT of newsreel or documentary film has been used" in the film's depiction of anti-colonial revolution, was not added to the film out of necessity - as so many critics, cultural commentators, and film historians have suggested (see, for instance, Baratieri, 17; Bignardi, 20; Celli,: 52; Cliento, 80; Clò, 208; Daulatzai, 38; Dowd, 26; Moruzzi, 265; O'Leary, 18; Panchasi, 343; Pauly, 35; Rainer, 1; Riegler, 48; Slocum, 25; Stam, 10; Virtue, 323; and Whitfield, 251). It was instead an addition made to the film as part of a broader marketing strategy conceived of by American distributors who understood the potential commercial and critical appeal of claims to heightened cinematic realism.

ability to achieve the "amazing feat of bringing to film a realistic and dramatic telling of actual events" (10).[14]

The Allied Artists' campaign manual for the film similarly transmuted the Algerian participation in the film's production into auteurist discourses of cinematic realism. The manual primarily framed the film as the product of "fifteen years of [Pontecorvo's] film achievement", wherein the "complete authenticity" of *The Battle of Algiers*' recreation of the Algerian War of Independence was understood as part of the director's career-long trajectory from political documentaries to feature-length productions (2). The manual furthermore emphasized the "extensive preparation" Pontecorvo undertook prior to shooting the film, and the years of research the director engaged in - in which "thousands of eye-witness accounts, documents, and photographs were gone over to produce an account, profuse with details of true incidents" which Pontecorvo and Franco Solanis then transformed into an "original and spectacular film story" (2). Saadi Yacef's role in initiating the project, and writing the memoirs on which the film's screenplay was largely based, were left undiscussed, as was the infrastructural and financial support offered to the production by the Algerian state.

Yacef did make an appearance in the Allied Artists campaign manual. A proposed review template featured in the manual is entitled "Actual Rebel Leader Has Key Role in 'The Battle of Algiers'" (2). However, within Allied Artists' vision of the film, Yacef's participation in the production was understood as the result of Pontecorvo's artistic decision to use non-professional actors - yet another testament to the director's uncompromising commitment to authenticity (2).

While the film was undoubtedly in part the product of Pontecorvo's artistic vision, the complete erasure of the Algerian role in initiating the project, developing the film's screenplay, and facilitating the film's production, is troubling. Within this discursive landscape, the film was no longer understood as a product of leftist internationalism between Pontecorvo's team, Casbah Films, and the post-revolutionary Algerian state, but an act of individual artistic expression that was decidedly Italian. Following a neocolonial logic, American distributors reduced the various Algerian people and institutions who contributed to the film's production to discoveries

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[14] In an interview with Nicholas Harrison for *Interventions,* Saadi Yacef estimated that the total financial value of the equipment, props, and location rentals that the Algerian state offered the production "would come to millions of dollars" (406)

unearthed by Pontecorvo in his quest for authentic cinematic realism. The emphasis on Pontecorvo-as-auteur thus effectively mitigated the supposedly potentially propagandistic qualities that the film retained as an expression of Algerian nationalism enacted by Algerian subjects and helped to facilitate the film's entrance in American markets.

Despite the need to downplay the film's material relationships to the FLN and the Algerian state, and thus distinguish the film from "propaganda", the *Box Office* article concludes that the film's sympathetic portrayal of the FLN is "one of the bones of controversy which might aid in the film's promotional value" (10). Indeed, American distributors were keenly aware of the extent to which the film's multi-dimensional depiction of Algerian revolutionaries would spark intrigue amongst American audiences. The Allied Artists' campaign manual emphasized the fact that the film's "authentic" depiction "of one of the most newsworthy and significant revolts of modern times, places the film in a unique category" (5). The manual goes on to instruct exhibitors to "capitalize in every way possible" on the film's "hot and provocative" depiction of anti-colonial revolution (5).

Thus, from the onset the film was promoted according to a simultaneous emphasis and disavowal of its anti-colonial politic. Discourses of cinematic realism and Pontecorvo as *auteur* would function to distance the film from "propaganda" - a label which the Algerianness of the production, and proximity to the FLN apparently necessitated. However, the film's engagement with the politics of decolonization, and its visualization of Algerian revolutionaries, would still function to generate controversy which, if correctly managed, could make the film commercially viable.

In practice, this promotional schema rooted in an emphasis on the film's Italianness, auteurism, and pseudo-documentary realism resulted in *The Battle of Algiers* being routinely framed for American audiences as a piece of Italian neorealism. The screening notes which accompanied the film's premiere at the New York Film Festival claimed that "*The Battle of Algiers* […] brings back to the cinema an epic quality one hasn't seen since the days of *Open City*" (15). The festival furthermore lauded Pontecorvo for his artistry and political commitment, claiming that with the Algerian revolution, the director had "found a subject big enough to recreate a neorealist cinema [freed] from all propaganda and sentimentality" (15). Assertions of

the film's status as neorealist and direct comparisons to Rossellini's *Rome, Open City* (1945) were frequent throughout the film's initial waves of promotional and critical reception.[15] A review published in *The Guardian* which rehearses the comparison to *Rome Open City* was furthermore reprinted in a 1968 Allied Artists press-release entitled, "Review Quotes: Critical Acclaim for 'The Battle of Algiers'". In this review, the author notes that while "one may have thought" that the "neorealist current" was "dead and buried", *The Battle of Algiers* "proves that it was only biding its time, waiting for a subject big enough to revive it" (2).

The film's immediate association with Italian neorealism is significant. While the specific breed of institutionalized film culture that characterized post-war America was dependent on the domestic distribution of films from many Western European nations and Japan, the import of Italian neorealism remains one of the most significant contributions to the American art-cinema markets for foreign films (Balio, 2010; Brennan 2011; Schoonover, 2012; Sklar, 2011; Willinsky, 2000). By referencing a film cycle that had already been embraced by American markets, distributors could lean on an established framework of promotional and critical protocols in order to render *The Battle of Algiers'* images of anti-colonial revolution legible and familiar to audiences. The category of neorealism allowed distributors to effectively meet the criteria necessary to make the film commercially viable. It distinguished the film from the dubious category of political propaganda by emphasizing the film's Italianness, its cinematic realism, and its status as the product of individual and masterful artistic expression.

The "Two-Pronged" Approach to Marketing Neorealism

In order to further unpack the significance of *The Battle of Algiers'* categorization as neorealist within American film markets, I will look to Karl Schoonover's *Brutal Vision: The Neorealist Body in Postwar Italian Cinema.* This is because of the extent to which Schoonover's text clearly prioritizes the geopolitical dimensions of this specific moment of inter-cultural and economic exchange. Schoonover describes how the discourses that were used to promote Italian neorealism within post-war American markets were structured by an ideological imperative to normalize the

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[15] See Crowther, 1967; Crowther, 1967; Dorn, 1967; Gardiner, 1967; Kauffman, 1967; Knight, 1967; Morgenstern 1967; and Simon, 1967.

new economic arrangements of the American economy and North Atlantic community. The central problematic of Schoonover's analysis is the way in which these discourses positioned Italian public life as a virtual geopolitical space under the "far reaching subjective authority" of the post-war American subject, and effectively marginalized issues of national sovereignty and normalized an increasingly interventionist American foreign policy (xvii).

Schoonover's emphasis on issues of national sovereignty and foreign intervention allow his text to function as a useful tool for unpacking the ideological and geopolitical implications of marketing *The Battle of Algiers'* images of anti-colonial revolution according to the promotional template of Italian neorealism. Indeed, while Schoonover's text focuses on the ideological dimensions of the Marshall Plan and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, he emphasizes the extent to which "European reconstruction was used as a template for the later large-scale humanitarian aid structures of neocolonialism" (xviii). He positions "the culture of humanitarian charity" established in post-war America as a direct precursor to the ideological mechanisms that would later normalize the neocolonial trade agreements, transnational NGOs, and military interventions that would come to structure the nation's relationship with much of the world over the course of the late twentieth-century and beyond (xxv). As one of the first cinematic depictions of anti-colonial revolution to circulate in post-war American markets, and moreover one that was explicitly constructed as a continuation of the neorealist tradition, the promotion and reception of *The Battle of Algiers* can provide insight into how the institutionalized cultures of American post-war liberal humanism responded to the period of decolonization, and the rise of Third Worldist nationalisms.

Indeed, in many respects the promotion and critical reception of *The Battle of Algiers* closely mimicked the dynamics of the post-war American import of Italian neorealism, as described by Schoonover. Schoonover outlines a "two-pronged" promotional strategy which characterizes the American distribution of Italian neorealism (81). On one hand, American distributors of Italian neorealism emphasized the films' artistic and social significance. As Schoonover notes, publicity campaigns for neorealist films regularly constructed them as "artistic achievements" which illustrated both the "beauty of aesthetic classicism, and the redeeming social function of cinema" (84).

The Allied Artists campaign manual for the film places a similar emphasis on *The Battle of Algiers*' artistic, cultural, and social merit. A reprint of a *Variety* article entitled "Year-End 'Best Pictures' Picks" featured on the first page of the manual emphasizes the extent of the film's critical acclaim in the American context (see Fig. 1). A review template included in the manual furthermore outlines a description of the film primarily based on recounting the numerous awards "garnered by the internationally-honoured film" (2).

Allied Artists' posters and advertisements for the film furthermore emphasized the film's artistry and social significance. Advertisement templates included in the campaign manual highlight the film's Academy Award nominations and feature pull-quotes which describe the film as "the most […] meaningful […] film in years", "the best of its kind", both "important" and "beautiful" (see Fig. 2 and Fig. 3). An advertisement in the Nov 12th, 1967 edition of the *New York Times,* amongst other publications, similarly exclaims that the film is "so important it was selected to open the 1967 New York Film Festival", and "the most universally acclaimed motion picture of the year!" (see Fig. 4). This general emphasis on *The Battle of Algiers'* artistic, and social significance was reinforced in much of the review journalism produced on the film. Charles Champlin of the *Los Angeles Times* suggested that the film showed the extent to which "film can be a force in society" (59). R.H. Gardiner asserted that the film's pronounced "artistic significance" "distinguishes it from any other" (95). Norman K. Dorn of *The San Francisco Examiner* similarly claimed that the film was "being hailed as among cinema's masterpieces" (142).

More often than not, the artistic and social significance of *The Battle of Algiers* was articulated in terms of its ability to offer audiences access to historical knowledge and a cosmopolitan awareness of world events. This aspect of the film's American distribution also parallels that of the American import of Italian neorealism. Schoonover emphasizes the extent to which American distributors engaged in a concerted effort to endow the act of watching Italian neorealist films with a pronounced "geopolitical weight" (103). Building off of discourses regarding film's supposedly universal legibility that had circulated extensively in post-war American film culture, American distributors attempted to posit Italian neorealist films as a

central mechanism through which American spectators could exercise the humanitarian and cosmopolitan sensibilities central to post-war globalism (Schoonover, 103).

For Schoonover, the specific protocols of spectatorship imagined by the American distributors who oversaw the circulation of Italian neorealist films in American markets fundamentally reflected the liberal humanist ideologies that supported post-war American expansionism. Enacted through the large-scale aid represented by the Marshall Plan, and the establishment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and other transnational NGOs, the emergence and expansion of what Victoria de Grazia has termed the "market empire" of commodity capitalism required a level of foreign intervention that was historically unprecedented (Grazia, 3; Schoonover, xvii). This period marked not only a dramatic shift in American foreign policy, but a fundamental reorganization of Euro-American economies into a North Atlantic community (Schoonover, xvii). Such a large-scale geopolitical and economic transition contained a corresponding ideological project, one which called "for a new way of knowing the world that more accurately [mirrored] its global character" (Schoonover, xviii).

Thus, the institutionalization of an American film culture organized around the import and exhibition of foreign films was undergirded by an ideological imperative to normalize the new economic arrangements of the American economy and North Atlantic community (Schoonover, xviii). In the immediate postwar period, a diverse range of "Hollywood lobbyists, policy makers, fledgling film society organizers, industry journalists, independent exhibitors, educators" and theatre owners, organized their distinct professional and financial investments in the American import and export of films around a unified set of discursive strategies (29). From their respective commercial and institutional contexts, these actors "argued that cinema's cross-cultural comprehensibility, ease of circulation through existing global networks of exchange, and essential realism ensured its status as the medium best able to expand world understanding" (94) Cinema was positioned as the ideal ideological and cultural tool for the "reimagining [of] transnational interdependencies" necessitated by post-war economics (94).

American distributors sought to position Italian neorealism as an important contribution to this process. They routinely emphasized the act of spectating neorealist films as not only an intellectual and socially-redeeming pursuit, but furthermore an inherently cosmopolitan

endeavour which marked the fulfillment of a new geopolitical responsibility of the "emblematic postwar humanist" (Schoonover, xvii).

Several aspects of the American distribution and reception of *The Battle of Algiers* can be seen as a direct continuation of this attempt to emphasize film-going as an intellectual pursuit with specifically geopolitical consequences. *New York Times* critic Bosley Crowther opened his review of the film by suggesting that "recent history is groaning with material that is begging to be pictorially analyzed", and that "the public, more visually oriented than it has been […] is avid to be enlightened and informed" (15). He asserted that *The Battle of Algiers* meets this specific demand for historical enlightenment, and that the film is "powerful" in its ability to "tautly [involve] the audience in a sense of kinship with contemporary events" (15). Crowther concluded his article by asserting that the film was a must-see for any viewers with "humanitarian sympathies" (15). In his *Life* magazine article, which was furthermore re-printed in the Allied Artists campaign manual, Maurice Rapf emphasized that the "subject" of *The Battle of Algiers* was "history, not movie stars", and the "[pertinence]" of the film's "examination of violence" to the contemporary moment (6). Harold Clurman of *The Nation* similarly highlighted the film's status as a source of historical and cosmopolitan knowledge, claiming that it was a "masterpiece" that was "much more an expression of our day than most of the plays we see in the theatre" (348). Stanley Eichelbaum of *The San Francisco Examiner* furthermore suggested that "there has never been a more astonishing film record of history than *The Battle of Algiers"* (37). Arthur Knight of the *Saturday Review* similarly claimed that "in Pontecorvo, the screen has discovered an exciting new historian", a review which Allied Artists later incorporated into an official press release on the film (75)

The status of *The Battle of Algiers* as a potential source of historical knowledge which would appeal to the cosmopolitan sensibilities of American audiences was furthermore directly emphasized in the Allied Artists campaign manual. The manual constructs the film as a source of knowledge on "one of the most newsworthy and significant revolts of modern times", and that as such, the film "is a history lesson in itself" (5). It furthermore advocates for exhibitors to market the film in ways which amplify its historical and geopolitical significance. The manual suggests that theatre-owners, "work with a local authority, such as a well known professor of political

science, to appear on appropriate [radio and TV] programs to discuss or debate the struggle for independence that is so effectively dramatized in the film" (5). It also instructed exhibitors to "invite department heads of local colleges and high schools to special screenings "in an effort to "encourage classroom discussion and lectures on" the film (5).

The urgency with which watching the film was constructed as a geopolitical responsibility of the American spectator is furthermore exhibited by Allied Artists' claim that "the happenings in *The Battle of Algiers,* in many ways parallel events taking place in the world today, in our country, and very possibility in your city as well" (5). This specific aspect of the film's distribution history will be discussed at length in the following chapters, but for now it is important to emphasize the extent to which Allied Artists sought to construct the film as a means by which American audiences could, and indeed should, expand their understandings of world history and current events.

On the other hand, while watching *The Battle of Algiers* was promoted as a decidedly serious, and socially-redeeming pursuit, American distributors simultaneously emphasized the extent to which the film offered spectators graphic and disturbing images of violence. This aspect of the film's legacy again mirrors the dynamics outlined by Schoonover. Schoonover notes that, while American distributors framed Italian neorealism in terms of its relevance to "humanitarian concerns" and "global communalism", they simultaneously emphasized the "salacious character of these imported films", and the "shocking" images of "imperiled bodies" and infrastructural destruction they offered American spectators (71).

The American distribution and critical reception of *The Battle of Algiers* recreates this discursive dynamic, as the film's supposedly exceptional mode of cinematic realism was routinely constructed in terms that emphasized the shocking and violent nature of its imagery. As *The Baltimore Sun* phrased it, the "nuclear blast" of *The Battle of Algiers* made "Roberto Rossellini's 'Open City' [seem like] mere T.N.T." (Gardiner, 95).

Indeed, while the Allied Artists campaign manual dedicated a significant amount of space to asserting the film's artistic and historical significance, it furthermore featured an abundance of graphic descriptions of the film's more violent sequences. The synopsis provided for the film highlights sequences in which "bombs are exploded in bars, airports, and nightclubs killing many

civilians" and French soldiers "explode a bomb in the Arab quarter, destroying a number of houses and killing men, women, and children" (1). Furthermore, a still featured in the manual which depicts a French soldier torturing an Algerian man is accompanied by a tagline which promises that "information is needed quickly in *The Battle of Algiers,* and at times, French paratroopers resort to the most terrible of means" (see Fig. 5). A section entitled "'Battle of Algiers' Recreates Stirring Revolt" similarly highlighted that film "graphically [recreates]" the "manhunt" that was conducted by French paratroopers "without pity" (2).

This emphasis on the films graphic depictions of violence and shock-value were furthermore rehearsed in much of the review journalism on the film. The review by Maurice Rapf for *Life,* that was later re-printed in the Allied Artists campaign manual, asserted that, despite not using "one frame of actual documentary film footage", the film was "explosively real" (4). *Time* magazine similarly asserted that the film had "the impact of a bombe plastique" (104). This quote was subsequently transformed into a tag-line for the film in the magazine's movie listings, wherein the film was described as having "the brutal impact of a bombe plastique" ("Time Listings" 4).

Proclamations about the film's shock-value were often accompanied by detailed descriptions of its graphic depictions of political violence and torture. Writing for *New Republic,* Stanley Kauffman produced an involved description of the film's brutality, noting that "bombings and killing are easy to control with sleight-of-eye" and that violent sequences are composed of "razor-thin editing that stops just before you see what you think you see - and then snaps on the dead bodies so swiftly that you are convinced you saw them shattered" (19). Bosley Crowther asserted that the film's scenes of torture were "as pictorially authentic and dramatically convincing as anyone could wish" (15). Writing for *TakeOne*, Patrick Macfadden asserted that "the screen almost bursts into flame" when depicting the "particularly horrible atrocities" and "mangled [bodies]" produced by the war. (25-26). Brendan Gill of the *New Yorker* suggested that the film "[achieved] miracles of verisimilitude" in its depiction of, "dust and heat and violent death" (93). Kevin Thomas of the *Los Angeles Times* similarly applauded the film's "flawless simulation of bombings, mass rioting, and incidental street fighting" as "awesome" (65).

The allure of the films' realistic depiction of revolutionary and military violence was furthermore emphasized in the visual materials produced by Allied Artists to promote the film. A selection of poster and advertisement templates included in the Allied Artists campaign manual hinge on various versions of an image of a mass of protestors charging into a battalion of French soldiers (see Fig. 6). Several posters include a photographic still of an aerial shot which details many protestors that have been killed or wounded. The presence of a tank suggests that this is only the beginning of what will undoubtedly be a highly destructive and violent conflict, as the tagline promises the American spectator an inside look at "The Revolt that Stirred the World!" (see Fig. 6).

An insert included in many of the poster templates which highlights the key figures of the film's narrative, similarly promises an array of violent imagery. An image of Colonel Mathieu (Jean Martin) is introduced as, "The French Colonel, who was forced even to torture!" (see Fig. 6). An image of Fathia (Samia Kerbash) the woman who is most extensively depicted in the oft-cited sequence in which Algerian women plant bombs in the French quarters of Algiers, is accompanied by a tagline which warns American audiences that she is "one of many women who stopped at nothing to win!" (Fig. 6).

Thus, while American distributors sought to frame *The Battle of Algiers* in terms of its social, artistic, and cultural value, they simultaneously engaged in a method of promotion more firmly rooted in a more exploitative emphasis on its violent imagery. In many ways this promotional strategy parallels those used to promote Italian neorealism amongst American audiences. Indeed, many scholars have outlined the extent to which Italian neorealism, amongst other European film cycles, was often marketed on the basis of its sexually explicit and violent imagery, rather than its artistic or cultural merit (Balio, 2010; Betz, 2003; Brennan, 2011; Elsaesser, 1994; Ray, 1985; Schoonover, 2012; Wilinsky, 2000). However, in his specific account of this phenomenon, Schoonover asserts that, in the context of the American import of Italian neorealism, these two seemingly contradictory frameworks for film promotion are most usefully considered as part of a single "two-pronged" marketing approach (72).

For Schoonover, over the course of the American import of Italian neorealism, distributors "relied on the term *realism* and its associations to commingle what had previously been assumed

to be distinct, inflexible, and opposing categories of spectatorial engagement" (72). American distributors developed promotional campaigns which knowingly, "[invited] two gazes at once", a mix of "the socially concerned contemplative gaze of art cinema and the sensationalist voyeuristic gaze of exploitation cinema" (71). Within this paradigm, the titillation offered by neorealism's sexually-explicit and violent imagery combines with the discursive emphasis on the film's historical and social significance, and is translated as a sense of historical immediacy (Schoonover, 72). For Schoonover, the American import of Italian neorealism produced marketing discourses which promoted a "new politics of engagement", whereby "neorealism's spectacular displays of violence were figured as productive sites where Americans could glimpse their own widening moral responsibilities for the North Atlantic community" (72). In practice, this dual emphasis on both the intellectual and titillating qualities of neorealist filmmaking resulted in marketing campaigns and review journalism which constructed the films as texts which offered American spectators previously unseen and "eyewitness" perspectives on world events (Schoonover, 72)

Following the trends outlined by Schoonover, in much of the marketing and review journalism which surrounded *The Battle of Algiers'* initial waves of American release, the film's graphic depictions of violence were understood as a central component of its heightened cinematic realism. This realism was furthermore constructed as the basis of the film's pronounced historical and artistic significance. Writing for the *New Yorker,* Brendan Gill emphasized *The Battle of Algiers* as "a chronicle of murder, torture, betrayal, and retribution", but asserted that "beneath and beyond its continuous squalid violence we perceive a redeeming purity of intention on the part of the chronicler" who has "sought to do justice […] to the facts of history […] as the basis of his work of art" (93). Harold Clurman of *The Nation* similarly asserted that "even in its most violent scenes the film indulges in neither sentimentality not delight in cruelty", and "contains none of the sadism common to so many pictures presented as entertainment" (348). In his celebratory review of the film for *The Baltimore Sun*, R.H. Gardiner distinguished the film from "selective" art, wherein viewers are presented "an arranged or edited version of life" (95). For Gardiner, spectators of *The Battle of Algiers* were given the impression that they were witnessing "the thing itself", precisely because in this film "buildings blow up, bodies are

removed from debris, and children cry in the streets…" (Gardiner, 95). This dual emphasis on titillation and contemplation was encapsulated by Maurice Rapf's exclamation that *The Battle of Algiers* was "the most exciting - and meaningful - film in years", a quote which was featured in almost all of Allied Artists' promotional materials on the film.

Gardiner's review also hints to the extent to which, like its neorealist predecessors, *The Battle of Algiers* was constructed as an "eyewitness" view of historical events. American critics routinely constructed the cinematic realism of *The Battle of Algiers* as an inherently innovative spectatorial experience that provided American audiences with a previously unseen and decidedly experiential perspective on the historical realities of the Algerian War of Independence. As Sandra Saunders of the *Philadelphia Daily News* phrased it*, The Battle of Algiers* provided the American spectator with an educational opportunity that was "infinitely more effective than all the miles of state newsreel clips usually seen in movies about historical events" (18). Harold Clurman of *The Nation* claimed that as "a masterpiece of epic realism" the film "creates the impression of total objectivity" and provides its spectators with "the sense that one is there in the midst of the moment" (348). Bosley Crowther suggested that the Algerian non-professional actors who play the "assorted bomb-throwers and terrorists", "make you believe that you are seeing the actual participants" of the FLN-led insurgency (1). Writing for the *Daily News,* Kathleen Carroll described the film as "relentlessly realistic", suggesting that it "gives you the sense of being [in the Casbah]" (768). Carroll went as far to suggest that the film's re-construction of the FLN's attempts to seize control of Algiers is so realistic that spectators had to "constantly remind [themselves] that [they] are the viewer of an extraordinary film, not an eyewitness to revolutionary ferment" (768). Similarly, writing for *The Washington Post,* Richard L. Coe claimed that "Pontecorvo […] has found a camera style - and thousands of cooperative Algerians - to suggest that this is the real thing" (D10).

Film critics' assertions of *The Battle of Algiers*' objectivity, and supposed ability to allow the American spectator to bear witness to the historical realities of the Algerian revolution are, of course, troubling. Coe's description of the Algerian people as "cooperative" participants in the recreation of their own history points to some of the more problematic power-dynamics inherent to the specific epistemological functions that the film served in the American context.

Indeed, for Schoonover, similar power dynamics characterized the American import of Italian neorealism. Schoonover suggests that the promotional discourses which framed Italian neorealist films as "eyewitness" perspectives on the historical realities of post-war Italy, worked to "both make the stakes of geopolitical interdependencies urgently palpable for Americans" and "refine [the American subject's] agency of the world" (xvii). By providing American spectators with the "fantasy of limited involvement" in post-war Italian public life, neorealist films were constructed as "the ultimate manifestation of a postwar cinematic politics of the image that authorizes the foreign gaze to adjudicate local politics" (xvii). Schoonover emphasizes the extent to which neorealism's shocking images of violence and infrastructural decay were constructed as pleas for humanitarian concern, and part of an explicit project to "redeem Italians as [Americans'] counterparts" (88). However, this process of redemption still involved a certain emphasis on geopolitical differentiation, as it relied on the violent subjugation of both Italian bodies and body politic (88). Schoonover suggests that Italian neorealist films were marketed in ways which both stoked humanitarian concern and provided American viewers "grounds on which they [could] see themselves as more advanced citizens of the world community" (88). By positioning American spectators as "a bystanding world citizen who is compelled to watch but remains at the periphery" of Italian national life, the films mimicked the "subjective affinities of liberal humanism", and compelled the American spectator to weigh the legitimacy of the Italian public from an all-knowing, yet distanced vantage point (73).

The supposedly "eyewitness" perspective to history that *The Battle of Algiers* offered similarly imbued many American critics, and by extension, American spectators, with a sense of authority over Algerian public life. Again mimicking the dynamics of its neorealist predecessors, the emphasis on the film's experiential quality resulted in a wave of critical reception which overtly positioned the film as a plea for extra-national adjudication.

However, the specifics of this adjudicatory process, and the corresponding spectatorial protocols envisioned for American spectators of *The Battle of Algiers*, were, of course, distinct from those of Italian neorealism in many respects. Within postwar American film culture, images of Algerian nationalism required an altogether distinct mode of ideological management than those of the Italian resistance or post-fascist nationalisms. While, like the specific vision of Italy

constructed during the US promotion of Italian neorealism, the Algerian national context was clearly constructed as a geopolitical location under the "far-reaching subjective authority" of the American spectator, the historical actors visualized in *The Battle of Algiers* remains outside the clear jurisdiction of the more fraternal dimensions of liberal humanism (Schoonover, 94). If the neorealist image of post-war Italian life worked to elicit a particular mode of humanist globalism which "redeemed Italians as [Americans'] counterparts" within the dynamics of the new economic and political structures of NATO, the images of the Algerian people provided by *The Battle of Algiers* - and the politics of decolonization and national sovereignty they symbolized - remained comparatively suspect (Schoonover, 94).

The "On Both Sides" Protocol of Interpretation

The suspicion that Algerian revolutionaries engendered within post-war American film culture resulted in a discursive tendency to emphasize the film as a condemnation of violence "on both sides" of the Algerian War of Independence.[16] Distributors promoted this particular reading of the film over the course of its initial waves of theatrical release. The film synopsis included in the Allied Artists' campaign manual emphasized the "endless grief and losses on both sides" of the war (1). The review by Rapf re-printed in the campaign manual also asserted that "what the film says to you will likely depend on what you already believe - about violence, colonialism, Arabs, or even the French…", but "Mr. Pontecorvo will wreak havoc on your convictions along the way" by emphasizing the "ruthless antagonists on either side of the social struggle" (Fig. 7). An Allied Artists press release included a pull-quote from a review by Louis Botto of *Look Magazine* which claimed that the film was "banned in France and Algeria because it shows atrocities

16 The "on both sides" framework is virtually ubiquitous throughout the review journalism that accompanied the films initial waves of American release. See: Adams, 1968; Cedrone, 1969; Carroll, 1967; Clurman, 1967; Dawson, 1971; Dorn, 1968; Ebert, 1968; Ebert, 1968; Ebert, 1969; Eichelbaum, 1968; Gardiner, 1967; Gardiner, 1969; Gill, 1967; Guerink, 1969; Kauffman, 1967; Kaufman, 1970; Kern, 1968; Knight, 1967; Kozloff, et al, 1967; Mootz, 1968; Morgenstern, 1967; Rapf, 1967; Saunders, 1967; Standish, 1968; Terry, 1968; Wilson, 1967; Wilson, 1968; "Battle of Algiers", 1975; "French Dislike Italian War Film", 1966; "Screen: The Battle of Algiers", 1968. Furthermore, in March of 1968, the film won the joint Protestant-Catholic award from the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures. The office credit the film "for confronting viewers with a recreation of a struggle for independence that evokes agony and understanding for both sides" ("'Bonnie' Gets Catholic Vote", 51).

committed by both countries" ("Review Quotes", 1).[17]

Within this discursive landscape, critical consensus was organized around a liberal logic which promoted the film as a pacifist meditation on the meaninglessness of violence, rather than a testament to the necessity of decolonization. This protocol of interpretation effectively marginalized, or altogether erased, questions of national sovereignty in the film's American promotion and reception.[18] For example, R.H. Gardiner of *The Baltimore Sun* emphasized that the film was "in no way slanted to make either side appear absolutely right or absolutely wrong" (95). Gardner went on to conclude that the "real subject matter of the picture" was "the horror of civil violence", and that the "responsibility for such violence is attributed as much to one side as another" (95). Writing for the *New Yorker,* Brendan Gill likewise eclipsed the issue of national sovereignty in his conclusion that Pontecorvo sought to tell "his tragic story" in a decidedly "ambiguous [light]", in an effort to illustrate the extent to which "evil men and good are alike in their capacity to discover things in life worth killing and being killed for" (93). *Film Quarterly,* similarly suggested that while the film was "political exposure", it was "not necessarily, by virtue of the fact, a partisan cry to arms" (26). The review concludes that, while Pontecorvo "is obviously in great sympathy with the rebels", he "seems to be telling us that both parties to an injustice - the givers and the receivers - are hooked into a merciless circuit of

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[17] The film was never banned in Algeria. Indeed, in a 1972 interview with Joan Mellen for *Film Quarterly,* Pontecorvo claimed that the film "was the greatest box-office success" in Algerian history (5). In his interview with Nicholas Harrison for *Interventions*, Yacef similarly claimed that when the film was first released in Algeria "there were vast queues a kilometre long outside the cinemas" (413). He furthermore asserted that the Algerian state currently owns rights to screen the film, and that it "has sometimes been shown on official holidays" (413).

[18] Over the course of my research, I have only come across five reviews in the American popular press which either prioritized issues of national sovereignty or remained largely sympathetic to the cause of Algerian independence. Two of these reviews primarily discuss the film as an allegory for the Vietnam War, and will be discussed at length in the following chapter (see: Ditlea, 1967; and "The Battle of Vietnam", 1967). Kevin Thomas' 1968 review of the film for the *Los Angeles Times,* concludes that the film "drives home the truth that the more people are repressed, the more unquenchable their thirst for freedom becomes" (65). However, Smith's conclusion is drawn in light of his decision to frame the film as an allegory to "the Negroes struggle for civil rights and equality" in the American context, and as such, his review only ambiguous touches on the question of national sovereignty (65). Smith's review will be discussed in detail in my third chapter. Simon Fox's review of the film for the *Los Angeles Times* labelled the violence of both the French military and the FLN as "unacceptable", however, he clearly asserted that the French are the film's "villains", whose "mistake was in not being able, or not caring to read the messages in what Harold MacMillan called 'the winds of change blowing through Africa'" (198). Susan Stark's review of the film for the *Detroit Free Press* similarly suggested that while the film humanizes the French, it simultaneously "wipes out all thoughts and feelings save those of the revolutionary cause" - a cause which "is as noble as it is inevitable" (1968: 36). However, Stark still displayed a certain level of skepticism towards anti-colonial nationalisms, as she opened her review by claiming that "even though Arab zealots and Negro militants have adopted *The Battle of Algiers* as their own, this remarkable film really belongs to everyone who cares about freedom" (36).

brutalization" (26). Maurice Rapf echoed these sentiments in her review of the film, wherein she proclaimed that if "[*The Battle of Algiers*] implies that violence is necessary to call attention to people's struggles for their rights, Pontecorvo also makes clear that violence leads to violence" (16). Harold Clurman furthermore asserted that the film "has classic and tragic dimensions beyond politics" and, despite the fact that it depicts the Algerian nation gaining independence, he suggested that it illustrates that wars "rarely achieve the benefits that both sides sincerely claim they are battling to bring about" (348). Thus, within the American popular press, *The Battle of Algiers* was not so much framed as a rallying cry for Third Worldist or anti-colonial solidarity, but as an urgent prompt for the American spectator to condemn the means by which Algeria gained independence.

Discourses of cinematic realism were central to the establishment of this protocol - the film's "realism", the quality which effectively distinguished it from propaganda and thus gave it ethical and artistic validity, was articulated primarily in terms of Pontecorvo's ability to correctly manage his sympathies for the Algerian people. For example, Harold Clurman claimed that the film "creates the impression of total objectivity" in so far as "we take little satisfaction at the 'triumph' or one side or the other in the mutual slaughter" (348). Sandra Saunders similarly celebrated the film for its "admirably objective" depiction of the war, noting that "it is to the film's credit that it doesn't take sides" (18). Writing for the for the *Boston Globe*, Marjory Adams likewise pronounced that the film "bears every mark of authenticity" and constituted "much more than propaganda for a rebellious minority" precisely because the film created the impression that "the cruel terrorism of the Arabs and the ruthless torture of the French military men proved nothing, accomplished nothing, toward making Algeria a better place to live" (19). George McKinnon of *The Boston Globe* suggested that "instead of playing God and judging right or wrong, Pontecorvo and his associates have chosen the […] role of recording angel" (125). For McKinnon, while Pontecorvo's "sympathy [was] plainly with the rebels, [his] allegiance [was] plainly to the truth", in his decision to portray the violence of the war as "indiscriminately terrible for French and Moslem alike" (125).

Thus, over the course of *The Battle of Algiers*' American reception, discourses of cinematic realism were mobilized in a way which regularly affirmed and empowered liberal

humanism in the face of an anti-colonial and anti-imperialist politic. According to this discursive framework, the artistic merit and cultural value of *The Battle of Algiers* was firmly rooted in its exceptional realism, a quality which was in turn dependent on the film's ability to render colonization and anti-colonial revolution as equally-destructive examples of ideological extremism. This ideological equivocation is clearly articulated in Maurice Rapf's review of the film, in which he suggested that the pivotal question Pontecorvo sought to pose to American audiences was "if you have to choose sides, does it really matter who struck first", "or do you just play follow the leader, whoever the leader may be?" (16).

Other Discursive Trends: Sensationalism, Racism, and Juxtaposition

These discursive attempts to ideologically equate colonial and anti-colonial violence become less clearly balanced when one considers the distinct ways in which the Algerians and the French were described. While the film itself was constructed as a significant source of historical knowledge, film critics and distributors remained consistently vague or in their descriptions of what exactly American spectators were supposed to have learned about the FLN. Indeed, in the Allied Artists campaign manual, the organization was repeatedly and incorrectly referred to as either the "NFL" or the "National Liberal Front", mistakes which were reproduced in review journalism on the film (8).[19] Throughout the initial waves of the film's American promotion and critical reception, the FLN were repeatedly rendered as abstract signifiers - as a veritable mob of "assorted bomb-throwers and terrorists" as Crowther so crassly put it - rather than a political organization composed of active political subjects (1).

Furthermore, decidedly sensationalist and often racist descriptions of both the FLN and the Algerian public at large abounded. *Time* magazine described the "Algerians" as "intense, fierce-eyed men and women, cold-blooded enough to blow up a restaurant full of innocents to prove a point" (4). Several other critics reproduced this specific description, or very similar characterizations, the film's Algerian characters as "fierce-eyed".[20] Furthermore, several critics

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[19] See Carrol, 1967; Champlin, 1967; Knight, 1967; and Saunders, 1967

[20] See Geertsema, 1968; Adam, 1967; Saunders, 1967; "Festival Action", 1967; and Thomas, 1968, wherein Thomas refers to Ali La Pointe as the "hot-eyed leader of the National Liberation Front" (65).

constructed the nationalist movement as one motivated by either the fanaticism, hatred, or intrinsically violent nature of the Algerian participants.[21]

This sensationalism was also regularly extended to descriptions of the Casbah itself, promising American spectators a glimpse into the supposedly disturbing realities of Algerian public life. The Allied Artists campaign manual described the Casbah as the "den of the international underworld", home to "prostitutes, drug addicts and suppliers, spies, and racketeers of all kinds" (1). Marjory Adams of *The Boston Globe* similarly referred to the Casbah as "the underworld" (19). William Mootz of the *Courier Journal* emphasized that the film "all but [recreates] the […] fetid smells of the Casbah" (8). Kathleen Carrol furthermore opened her review of the film for the *Daily News* by asserting that the "eerie sounds" and "piercing cries" which "echo in the cavernous streets of the Casbah" would "chill" American spectators "to the bone" (86).[22]

These dehumanizing and exoticizing descriptions of the Algerian people were often accompanied by characterizations of Jean Martin's Colonel Mathieu which emphasized both his intelligence and compassion. Thus, while established protocols of interpretation promoted readings of the film as a condemnation of violence on both sides of the Algerian War, the French were more regularly constructed for American audiences as characters with familiar and redeemable qualities.

Where Bosley Crowther described the performances of the "rebel leaders" of the FLN as marked with "ferocity" and "fervor", he emphasized the Colonel's "fairness and even respect for

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[21] Susan Saunders remarked that the Algerian rebels depicted in the film were as "fanatical" as "the real freedom-fighters must have [been]" (18). *Time* magazine similarly suggested that Brahim Haggiag's Ali La Pointe "displays the fanatic intensity that the FLN must have had" (4). T. Geertsema of the *Kingston Daily* described the Algerian people as "intense […] men and women of cold blood and courage who see their fanaticism pay off" (29). Myles Standish furthermore described Ali La Pointe as one of several "fanatic Algerian leaders" (45). Barbara Wilson emphasized the "brooding hatred of the illiterate Ali La Pointe" (25). Norman K. Dorn remarked that the Algerian War of Independence was fuelled by the Algerian people's "vast hatred and bitterness against the French" (142). *Film Quarterly* described Ali La Ponte as "a man whose very face is lethal" (Kozloff et al, 26). Susan Stark similarly described La Pointe as "a ragged, illiterate, ragingly hostile young man spawned by the Casbah" (36)

[22] Many critics focused specifically on the film's depiction of women ululating during mass demonstrations in their alarmist descriptions of the Algerian public. Martin Levine remarked that the film was full of "alien sounds, like the voiced gutturals of Arab speech" (K3). Barbara L Wilson similarly highlighted the "eerie cry that erupts from the throats of the Arabs" as a particularly disturbing element of the film (25). *The News Journal* described the Algerian population as composed of "large Muslim mobs with [an] eerie whistling wail" ("Battle of Algiers Was First", 24)

the resistance leaders" and suggested that he makes "one [feel] as though one is truly watching the spectacular and compassionate Massu" (56). After describing the Colonel as a "compassionate but implacable paratrooper", Martin Levine of *The Washington Post* labelled "the voiced gutturals of Arab speech" as "alien sounds" (K3). Susan Saunders described the Colonel as "a man of grace and wit" whose intention to "restore order and put an end to the terrorist bombings and killings" was "understandable" (18). She then goes on to assert that "there is a beauty amidst the ugliness and horror in the expressive faces of the Algerians" who she described as "fierce-eyed and fanatical" (18).[23] Stanley Kauffman went as far as to assert that "the French people - including teen-agers and babies who are blown up by Arab terrorist are considerably more attractive to our eyes than the natives" (29).

The Battle of Algiers and the Limits of Post-War Liberal Humanism

The discursive trends that characterized *The Battle of Algiers'* initial waves of American distribution and reception both parallel and diverge from those outlined by Schoonover. While the film was routinely framed as a piece of neorealism, and largely promoted according to the same template that American distributors had used for the Italian film cycle, it sat precariously at the limits of the post-war liberal humanism that Schoonover describes. Distributors and critics carefully mediated the imagined American spectator's relationship to the film's images of Algerian nationalism and anti-colonial revolution. By framing the film as a condemnation of violence "on both sides" of the Algerian war and constructing the Algerian people in largely sensationalist and racist terms, film critics and distributors established clear boundaries regarding American audiences' potential identifications with Algerian nationalisms. In doing so, they engaged in the difficult project of appropriating the film's imagery in the name of post-war liberal

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[23] This kind of juxtaposition occurred in more several reviews. *Time* magazine wrote: "An illiterate, rebel leader, Brahim Haggiag displays the fanatic intensity that the [FLN] must had had, and Jean Martin as the French colonel supplies an intelligence and wit that are not written into his role" ("Festival Attraction" 7). Myles Standish described the Colonel as a "cool, jaunty fellow, who was once a member of the French resistance" who faced-off against the "fiery" and "fanatic Algerian leaders" (45). After detailing sequences in which the FLN "attack its own people", Clifford Terry described the Colonel as "professionally tough but honourably fair" (49). Where Barbara Wilson constructed the Colonel as "a calm, intelligent soldier, determined to fulfill his mission, and yet revealing a certain compassion for the people he must bring to heel" she labelled Ali La Pointe as an "illiterate" motivated by a "brooding hatred" (25).

humanisms.

The fact that *The Battle of Algiers* required a different mode of ideological management than its neorealist precursors is perhaps unsurprising given that the film is a visualization of anti-colonial revolution. Indeed, many anti-colonial intellectuals have described decolonization as a political project which fundamentally destabilized the philosophical tradition of humanism as it had been defined by, and institutionalized within, imperialist culture. In *Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon describes the "colonial world" as "Manichean", and noted that often this "Manichaeanism reaches its logical conclusion and dehumanizes the colonized subject" (6-7). For Fanon, "decolonization" was not only a judicial and economic project, but one of complete social and philosophical reorganization - which "[infused] a new rhythm, specific to a new generation of men, with a new language and a new humanity" (2).

In his *Discourse on Colonialism*, Aimé Césaire similarly emphasizes the "hypocrisy" of humanisms developed in imperialist cultural contexts (31). Labelling the European humanist philosophical tradition as "pseudo-humanism", he contended that "for far too long it has diminished the rights of man, that its concept of those rights has been - and still is - narrow and fragmentary, incomplete and biased, and all things considered, sordidly racist" (31). Césaire firmly rooted his analysis in a comparison of colonialism to Nazism. He contended that "before [Europeans] were its victims, they were its accomplices", "they tolerated that Nazism before it was inflicted on them, […] they absolved it, shut their eyes to it, legitimize it, because, until then, it had been applied onto non-European peoples" (36). For Césaire, what liberal Europeans "[could not] forgive Hitler for [was] not *the crime* in itself, *the crime against man,* it [was] not *the humiliation of man as such*", but the "crime against the white man" and the "[application] to Europe colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusive for" colonized peoples, including "the Arabs of Algeria" (31).

The specific arguments Césaire uses in his efforts to reveal the hypocrisy of colonial humanisms were reflected in *The Battle of Algiers* itself. In a sequence depicting a press conference held by Colonial Mathieu, a reporter accuses the French military of employing fascist techniques in their counter-insurgency operations. Mathieu responds by stating:

> We aren't madmen or sadists, gentlemen. Those who call us Fascists today, forget the contribution that many of us made to the Resistance. Those who call us Nazis, don't know that among us there are survivors of Dachau and Buchenwald. We are soldiers and our only duty is to win.

Pontecorvo has stated that his intention behind this sequence, and his broader depiction of the French military was to reveal the "logic of colonialism" (in Mellen, 4). He asserted that he and Franco Solanis, the film's co-writer, "didn't care if you could find sadistic people among the paratroopers", and instead found it "much more interesting" to focus on "a colonel who is completely normal and obliged by the historical context to do something", as this would reveal the "logic of colonialism" as one which is "confused" (4). Here, Pontecorvo echoes Césaire's sentiments regarding the hypocrisy of a humanism which seeks to simultaneously condemn Nazism and endorse colonial rule.

However, in the context of the film's initial waves of American critical reception, the meaning of this sequence was subject to mixed interpretation. Out of the eight reviews I have come across which discuss this specific sequence, only three interpret Mathieu's statements as an attempt to comment on the hypocrisy of the French military.[24] The rest understand this sequence less as a moment of ironic commentary, and more as a straightforward attempt on the part of Pontecorvo to humanize the French and thus forward the "both sides" interpretive paradigm.[25]

Indeed, many film critics were quick to rationalize French military violence. Harold Clurman claimed that the French had a significant amount of "justification for the repression of

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[24] Kozloff, et al, described this moment as "ironic", however, their interpretation of the sequence also worked to equate colonial and anti-colonial violence in certain respects. They claim that "*The Battle of Algiers* is merely one instalment in a sequence of chronically switched roles", in which "the compatriots of those French railroad workers murdered in their struggle against the Germans are shown, ten years later, to play the part of those very Germans in Algiers; meanwhile, the Algerians have enthusiastically endorsed an Arab 'Holy War' against Israel, while the Jews, classic victims of the Nazis, are now illegally arresting, without trial, Arabs in the old city of Jerusalem." (28). Roger Ebert criticized the Colonel's logic, noting that "there was a time when he did not need to ask himself why the Nazis did not belong in France" (2). However, Ebert still claims that "the strength of the film, I think, comes because it is both passionate and neutral, concerned with both sides" (2). Simon Fox was decidedly the most astute in his reading of the sequence as a criticism of colonial logic, stating that "with sickening irony we see these men set about visiting all the horrors which they sugared under Nazi rule upon their prisoners" (198).

[25] See Clurman, 1967; Rapf 1967; Mootz, 1967; Standish, 1968; Stark 1968.

the Algerian revolt", as "they had been in Algeria for 130 years, had developed the country, and given full rights of citizenship to the Algerians" (348). Maurice Rapf furthermore contended that, while Pontecorvo was sympathetic to the cause of Algerian independence, he also "understands - and is willing to show - why the [French] army will, or must, try" to retain control over the colony (16).

This rationalization of French military violence was furthermore regularly extended to the film's depiction of the use of torture against the Algerian population. Torture was routinely constructed as an efficient and necessary method by which the French military sought to contain the FLN-led insurgency. Clurman described the French military's use of torture as a technique enacted "with quiet and deadly efficiency" that allowed them to "round up the leaders of one of the most active of the terrorist units" (348). Norman Dorn similarly claimed that Colonel Mathieu "performed the ordered elimination of FLN groups, chiefly through the incitement of betrayal through torture" (142).

The tendency to frame the French military's use of torture as both efficient and effective was furthermore regularly accompanied by suggestions that the soldiers who engaged in it did so unwillingly and out of necessity. Norman Dorn described the French Colonel as "agonized by fulfilling his duty" (142). Roger Ebert claimed that while the Colonel "respects his opponents" he believes "correctly, no doubt […] that ruthless methods are necessary" (2). June McDonald of the *Ithaca Journal* proclaimed that "though intellectually and emotionally opposed to these methods, the French colonel in charge pursues them methodically in the line of duty" (30). In yet another celebration of the real-life General Massu, Bosley Crowther asserted that Jean Martin's Colonel Mathieu "is so impressive and his attitude of regard for the cause and bravery of the rebels is so sure, even though he has to torture and kill some of them, that he does full credit to the character of General Massu" (15). After noting that the French paratroopers were in an "impossible situation", John Simon suggested that they "conduct their mandatory brutality not without some regret [and] some immanent sympathy for their victims" (374). Similarly, Brendan Gill asserted that Martin "conveys superb the toughness and intelligence of the military careerist, who, knowing precisely how distasteful the performance of his duty may be, never flinches from the necessity of performing it" (93). In the posters and campaign manual produced for the film,

Allied Artists furthermore endorsed this particular understanding of torture as a necessity which French soldiers were either "forced" to engage in or "resorted" to (see Fig. 5 and 6).

It is important to emphasize the extent to which American critics and distributors' attempts to make quantitative equivocations of the French and Algerian experiences of the war significantly diverge from historical reality. Alistair Horne has outlined that, while the French military authorities counted their losses at 26,000, estimates of Algerian casualties have ranged from 350,000 (from a French official source) to 1.5 million (from the FLN) (538).

Furthermore, the specific constructions regarding the French military's use of torture that circulated in conjunction with *The Battle of Algiers*' initial waves of American distribution also distorted the historical realities of the Algerian War of Independence. As Nicholas Harrison has noted, many historians and war correspondents have emphasized the degree to which the French military's use of torture was neither systematic nor controlled (399). Former member of the Conseil National de la Révolution Algérienne, Mohamed Lebjauoi, has asserted that the events which took place in Algiers between 1954 and 1957 were not so much a "battle" between two militant forces, but were instead a "giant terror operation inflicted on the capital's Muslim population" by the French military (in Harrison, 397). Labor historian Donald Reid has echoed this sentiment, writing:

> Edward Behr estimates that during the Battle of Algiers, thirty to forty percent of adult males in the casbah were arrested for questioning; all arrested, male and female, were tortured, wrote [Germain Tillion], unless saved by the rapid intervention of a powerful protector … [M]ost of the torture carried out by the French army was done to humiliate and terrorize the [Algerian] population […] [and was not part of a specific] police strategy to purge the casbah of the FLN. (in Harrison, 399)

Frantz Fanon similarly emphasized the extent to which torture was enacted on the Algerian public at large in an article for the FLN's journal *El Moudjahid* published in September of 1957. In this article, Fanon described torture not as a military technique but a "way of life" for French colonists, something which was "'inherent' in colonialism" (Fanon in Harrison, 399).

Here, Fanon echoes the more general description of colonialism he provided in *Wretched of the Earth.* Fanon asserts the distinct ways in which imperial power is enacted in capitalist and colonial contexts. Where "in capitalist countries a multitude of sermonizers, counselors, and 'confusion-mongers' intervene between the exploited and the authorities", in "colonial regions", the "police and military ensure the colonized are kept under close scrutiny, and contained by rifle butts and napalm" (1961: 4). For Fanon, "in the colonies the economic infrastructure is also a superstructure", in which colonial power asserts itself in "the language of pure violence" (1961: 4-5). Indeed, this inherently violent quality of colonization was perhaps the aspect of the Algerian situation that became the most clearly distorted over the course of the film's initial waves of American distribution and critical reception.

Contextualizing the Film's Promotion and Reception Within American-Algerian Relations

Just as the American distributors of Italian neorealism framed those films in terms which met the ideological imperatives of the then newly established North Atlantic community, the discourses and protocols of interpretation promoted over the course of *The Battle of Algiers*' early years of American circulation in many ways reflect the dynamics of contemporaneous Algerian-American relations. The "on both sides" interpretive framework reflected the ambiguous economic and diplomatic investment the American government had in the project of national liberation.

While Kennedy officially congratulated Algeria after it gained independence, the American position towards Algerian sovereignty was laced with suspicion and ambivalence. Fanon noted that, within the context of the Algerian War, Americans had "no qualms officially declaring they are the defenders of the right to people's self-determination" (38). However, while official French colonialism could easily be criticized, the notion of sovereignty remained acceptable in so far as newly independent nations were willing to economically facilitate post-war American expansionism. As Fanon asserted, within the "new context" of the growing decolonization movement, "Americans [took] their role as the barons of international capitalism very seriously" (38).

Indeed, historian David Byrne has outlined the extent to which, within context of the Cold War, the FLN's willingness to engage in diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union over the

course of the war "provoked consternation in Washington" (95). In a memo written in October of 1960, the head of the State Department's Africa desk warned that "if Algeria gained its independence as a result of Soviet assistance, Washington should expect to see - 'as a minimum' - the creation […] of 'a vigorous, dynamic state whose national policies would be somewhat comparable to those of Yugoslavia after World War II" (in Byrne, 95).

This trepidation regarding Algerian's economic and diplomatic policies developed throughout the post-independence era. The Algerian government would become a key figure of the Non-Aligned Movement and remain technically detached from either the Soviet or Western blocs (Dickinson, 53). However, even this policy of detachment provoked suspicion from the United States government. The United States had condemned the policy of non-alignment as early as 1956, when Secretary of State John Foster Dulles famously described the policy of non-alignment as an "immoral and short-sighted" approach to foreign policy (in Byrne, 7). Moreover, as the Non-Aligned Movement pursued more clearly economically leftist policies regarding international trade over the course of the Cold War, the United States government became more decidedly invested in its containment and/or dismantling.[26]

The policies of economic nationalization that Algeria pursued post-independence explicitly undermined the American government's avid pursuit of the expansion of free-market economies in the post-war period. Indeed, even the specific expansionist desires of the American film industry were curtailed by the Algerian government. In 1969, after the Algerian government attempted to "curb the inflows of foreign product" into their national film industry through the establishment of domestic quotas, the Motion Pictures Export Association of America (MPEAA) initiated a boycott against film trade with the nation until 1974 (Khanna, 28; Dickinson, 72).

American distributors and critics who promoted *The Battle of Algiers* to American audiences rehearsed discourses which met the ideological imperatives of America's ambivalent relationship to Algerian nationalisms. The violence of the French military who attempted to retain control over the nation could be criticized in the name of an abstract notion of freedom. However, Algerian nationalists also needed to be met with a certain degree of skepticism, as the Algerian

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[26] For fuller accounts of the shifts in American foreign policy that occurred in response to developments within the Non-Aligned movements see: Byrne, 2016; Malloy, 2017; and Prashad, 2007.

national sovereignty constituted a threat to America's contemporaneous neo-colonial economic projects.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the distinction between neorealism and political propaganda which characterized the discursive foundations of *The Battle of Algiers*' entrance into American markets reveals some of the ideological contours of American art-cinema industries themselves. The film's relationship to the Algerian state and proximity to the FLN constituted a fundamental problem to be overcome. While images of anti-colonial revolution were deemed potentially marketable and thus acceptable, anti-colonial revolutionaries themselves, and the institutions they created, remained suspect. For the post-war American film industry, American audiences were prepared to engage with images of the Algerian revolution in so far as they were constructed as products of Pontecorvo's artistic investment in cinematic realism. Within this configuration, the Algerian public was constructed primarily as Pontecorvo's discovery, rather than historical actors or political subjects in their own right. This unwillingness to engage with the film as an expression of Algerian nationalism enacted by Algerian people and institutions, was perhaps one of the key factors which opened the film up to readings that so overtly eschewed issues of national sovereignty and played directly into the neo-colonial imperatives of contemporaneous American foreign policy.

Chapter Two:

*The Battle of Algiers, (*Anti)Colonial Allegories, and the Vietnam-Era American Media Landscape

Over the following two chapters, I will explore how, over the course of *The Battle of Algiers'* American circulation, the film was read in relation to America's own imperialist projects and histories. From the moment the film premiered at the New York Film Festival in September of 1967, many American critics framed it as an analogy for either the Vietnam War, or contemporaneous race-relations in the United States. The tendency amongst film critics to read the film as an allegory for either the Vietnam War or the black-liberation movement was undoubtedly in part a reaction to the anti-colonial politics embedded within the film-text itself. The film was intended to function as a contribution to the increasingly internationalist network of anti-colonial political movements that had taken shape over the course of the post-war period. Pontecorvo himself asserted that with *The Battle of Algiers, "*[he] was mainly interested in showing [the] unstoppable process of liberation" occurring "not only in Algeria, but throughout the entire world" (Pontecorvo in Said, 24). The film's production and distribution moreover represented a "forebear" of the post-revolutionary Algerian state's broad and extensive contributions to the mechanics of Third Worldist and anti-colonial internationalism, which sought to develop "a self-reliant third world infrastructure" operating in resistance to the neo-colonial flows of global capital (Dickinson, 51). Thus, for the diverse range of actors involved in the film's production, the film was always intended to be read by international audiences in relation to their own experiences of, and struggles against, imperialism and colonialism.

However, within the context of *The Battle of Algiers'* circulation within American art-cinema markets, the potential allegorical functions of the film were mobilized by a vast range of actors located across the political spectrum. Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, the supposedly "eyewitness" perspective of political revolution that *The Battle of Algiers* offered the American spectator was increasingly framed as a source of knowledge on the realities of the Vietnam War or American race politics. While the film was regularly screened for leftist, Third

Worldist, and/or anti-racist purposes in both grassroots and institutional contexts in the United States, within the American popular press, the film became a useful and virtually ubiquitous reference point for stoking anxieties regarding either Vietnamese or Black-American nationalisms. This more sensationalist, and often quite reactionary, interpretation of the film's allegorical capacity was furthermore both catalyzed and institutionalized by the shifting promotional campaigns developed by Allied Artists throughout the period.

The next two chapters will outline the general trends of this particular aspect of *The Battle of Algiers*' American legacy. I will reveal the films' initial waves of American distribution to be a period characterized by a persistent and ongoing struggle to define the film's meaning, and, by extension, to either confront or naturalize the realities of American imperialism. This chapter will focus specifically on the film's uptake as an analogy for the Vietnam War in the American context, and the following chapter will look at the film's promotion in relation to black-American political organizing.[27]

Filling a Gap: *The Battle of Algiers* as a Dramatization of the Vietnam War

The Battle of Algiers was constructed as an allegory for the Vietnam War within some of the earliest reviews of the film in the American press. Within the coverage of the film's premiere at the New York Film Festival, many critics detailed the audience's reaction to the film, and emphasized the film's relevance to contemporaneous American foreign policy.[28] Both Charles Champlin of the *Los Angeles Times* and Margot Hentoff of the *Village Voice* noted that after the sequence in which a series of bombs are set off in the French quarters of Algiers, one attendee shouted "Saigon is next!", and evoked a mixed response of applause and boos from the rest of the

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[27] As two central fixtures of the broadly-defined American Third Worldist movement, there was, of course, extensive overlap between the anti-war and black-liberation movements. As such, there will be a certain amount of overlap between this chapter and the proceeding one, in terms of both the issues that will be raised and the primary sources that will be discussed. When possible, I have attempted to flag these moments of cross-over and draw connections across chapters. This has been done both for the sake of clarity and organization, and, more importantly, in an effort to emphasize both the existence of currents of solidarity with black-liberation within the political organizations that have been most routinely characterized as the epicentre of anti-Vietnam War activism, as well as the indispensable contributions that the various sectors of the black-liberation movement made to the implementation, development, and maintenance of the anti-war movement.

[28] See: Champlin, 1967; Clurman, 1967; Crowther, 1967; Crowther, 1967; Crowther 1967; Ditlea, 1967; Hentoff, 1967; and Morgenstern, 1967.

audience (Champlin, 59; Hentoff, 36). After describing the screening as "uncustomarily tumultuous", Champlin concluded that the "loud reactions sharply revealed the wide and perhaps widening division in attitudes here toward Vietnam" (74). Steve Ditlea of *The Barnard Bulletin* similarly asserted that "it is inevitable that *The Battle of Algiers* will be viewed in light of current events in Vietnam", noting that "when a newsman [referred] to Sartre's opposition to the war" the audience "translated [it] as the liberal's opposition [to Vietnam]" and "when one of the rebels [denounced] the napalming of Algerian villages, the audience [reacted] with applause" (2).

The audience's divided reaction to the film's premiere, as well as the tendency amongst film critics to highlight and emphasize it, can in part be attributed to the contemporaneous American media landscape's responses to the Vietnam War. *The Battle of Algiers* premiered at the New York Film Festival in September of 1967, several years into a period of escalation in the war enacted by Lyndon Johnson's administration. Furthermore, the film's release was shortly followed by the Tet Offensive in January of 1968, in which North Vietnamese forces attacked several American-occupied military centres, including the U.S. Embassy in Saigon. For many scholars, the Tet Offensive marked an important turning point in media representations of the war (Hallin, 1986; Hammond, 1988; Knightely, 2004; Spencer, 2005). The attacks launched against the American military undermined the Johnson administration's attempts to construct American military operations in terms of a narrative of progress (Hallin, 9; Hammond, 7; Spencer, 57). As information released by the American government increasingly conflicted with accounts of the war provided by American war correspondents, mainstream news media began to regard the administration with increased suspicion and, by extension, compound the divisions that had already characterized public opinion regarding the war (Hallin, 9; Hammond, 7; Spencer, 57).

Furthermore, many scholars have emphasized the cultural, social, and political significance of the extent to which the Vietnam War was televised (Anderegg, 2008). For Michael Anderegg, the Vietnam War was "the most visually represented war in [American] history" (2). Anderegg notes that developments in camera technology and "one day relay of film and other forms of rapid dissemination" facilitated the transformation of the war into a "television event" (2). Within this media landscape, Americans were presented with images which contained an "immediacy never before experienced in the history of warfare" (2).

However, despite the heightened visibility of the war facilitated through American news media, Anderegg notes that the period was simultaneously marked by a pronounced absence of fiction films or American popular cultural productions which provided direct commentary on the war itself (Anderegg, 2). Where both World War II and the Korean War were accompanied by a significant output of American studio productions which functioned as morale boosting wartime propaganda, Anderegg notes that the American studios "had little interest in the Vietnam War as such" (15). Indeed, John Wayne's *Green Berets* (1968) was the only film released in America over the course of the Vietnam War which took combat in Southeast Asia as its primary subject (Anderegg, 15).

The tension between both the pronounced visuality of the Vietnam War through television news media, and the lack of popular cultural works which provided commentary on the war itself, is directly articulated in Bosley Crowther's review of the 1967 New York Film Festival for *The New York Times*. Crowther opened his article by asserting:

> What with so much engrossing drama happening all over the world - and with bits of it swiftly transmitted in newsreel style to the home screen audience via television shows - the chance for theatrical motion pictures to keep up with and do much in a journalistic war of visualizing current events for the public is ever more slim and remote. But the chance for theatrical motion pictures to be used to reenact real-life events and, at the same time, interpret or endow them with implications after the fact has never been better or more inviting than it is right now. The public - more visually oriented than it has been - and getting more so every day by virtue of our picture-plastered culture - is avid to be enlightened and informed. Recent history is groaning with material that is begging to be pictorially analyzed. (15)

For Crowther, *The Battle of Algiers* directly met the American public's desire to be historically "enlightened" (15). He went on to suggest that what was "powerful" about the film was its ability to "tautly [involve] the audience in a sense of kinship with contemporary events", and that "viewers with partisan feelings and humanitarian sympathies [will] readily see in the endeavors

of the Algerians to free themselves […] a parallel to what is happening in Vietnam." (15). Crowther even went as far as to claim that "what we have in this picture […] is a virtually contemporary précis of the waging and the drama of civil war in an environment as convincing as that of Saigon", and that American viewers will "become almost as much involved in its waging, as we would if we were seeing a drama of the war in Vietnam today" (15).

Crowther was not alone in his assertion that the film functioned as a veritable dramatization of the Vietnam War. Nor was he the only critic to read the film against a lack of cinematic visualizations of the war within contemporaneous American film-markets. In his review for *Film Quarterly,* Max Kozloff noted that *The Battle of Algiers* "has been banned in France, where its content would be almost as troubling as would a similar account of the Vietnam war here" (28). Kozloff went on to frame the film as a welcome relief to the Vietnam-era American media landscape. He suggested that "Hollywood may yet give us its version of the Vietnam War, if John Wayne has his way, but it cannot be reasonable expected to abandon its well-known equation of glamour with gore" (28). Furthermore, he contended that "on-the-spot film reporting of the war, despite its undoubted veracity, has already shown itself uninvolving", as "the strictly factual recording of violence has a numbing effect" (28). For Kozloff, *The Battle of Algiers* addresses the shortcomings of both of the cinematic modes through which the Vietnam War had been, or would be, visualized for the American public, as the film "combines the clip, the grabbed quality, and the authenticity of reportage, with the calculated omniscience of a dramatist's eye" (28).

Writing for *The San Francisco Examiner,* film critic Norman K. Dorn framed the film in similar terms as Kozloff and Crowther's. He concluded his review by asserting that "while it may be easy to assume lofty attitude toward France's protest and embargo of *The Battle of Algiers,* there are nagging secondary questions", namely "what will be official response when independence - or even major - studios of the United States attempt to uncover the tragedy of this country's involvement in Vietnam?" (142). Rob Guerink of *The Atlanta Constitution* similarly contended that "some American film-maker is going to make an American political film like [*The Battle of Algiers*]", and that if "a whole lot of [films] like this start heading this way" American audiences may begin to "hanker for the good old days and nice, safe pictures like [Russ Meyer's

X-rated] *Vixen* [(1968)]" (17).

Thus, for many film critics, *The Battle of Algiers* addressed an important gap in contemporaneous American-film markets. Within a news media landscape flooded with graphic images of the on-the-ground violence of the war, and often contradictory journalistic accounts of the status of the war itself, the need for cinematic representations which could narrativize and thus help make sense of the war for American audiences, became pressing. With its neorealistic blend of pseudo-documentary aesthetics and melodramatic rendition, and its vivid representation of military violence and guerrilla warfare, *The Battle of Algiers* could function as a useful stand-in for a cinematic dramatization of the Vietnam War.

Allied Artists' Promotion of the Film as an (Anti)Colonial Allegory

Importantly, this potential allegorical function of *The Battle of Algiers* was embraced and promoted by the film's American distributors. The Allied Artists campaign manual directly emphasized the film as pseudo-commentary on current events. In a section entitled "These Ideas Will Sell Tickets!", the manual asserted that "the happenings in *The Battle of Algiers,* in many ways parallel the events taking place in the world today, in our country, and very possibly in your city as well" (Fig. 8). Exhibitors were instructed to "capitalize in every way possible on the fact that *The Battle of Algiers* is as hot and provocative as today's headlines", noting that the film "provides the perfect subject matter for radio/TV forums and talk shows" (5).

Allied Artists furthermore endorsed reviews of the film which emphasized its allegorical capacity. An Allied Artists press release featured a pull-quote from Normin Corwin, who asserted that the film "has profound things to say about the morality of our time and our world" ("Review Quotes", 2). The *Life* magazine review by Maurice Rapf which was re-printed in the campaign manual also emphasized "how pertinent [the film's] examination of violence and the 'acceptance of its consequences' can be for the rest of us" (16).

While Allied Artists regularly remained vague about to which specific world events the film was meant to be read in relation, one can assume that, in 1968, many of the "hot and provocative" contemporaneous news headlines that the distributor referenced would be related to the war. Indeed, regardless of whether or not Allied Artists explicitly endorsed readings of the

film as an analogy for the Vietnam War specifically, the promotional framework resulted in a wave of critical reception during the period of circulation which emphasized the film's relevance to the American invasion.[29] Following the logic outlined in the campaign manual, many American exhibitors were also quick to embrace the allegorical function of the film specifically in relation to the Vietnam War. Crowther's construction of the film as "a virtually contemporary précis of the waging and the drama of civil war in an environment as convincing as that of Saigon", was included in a series of advertisements for the film at New York City's Beekman Theatre (Fig. 4 and Fig. 9).

The Battle of Algiers as a Vehicle for Anti-Imperialist Critique of American Foreign Policy

Within the context of the film's initial waves of American circulation, this interpretive protocol had varied effects. In some instances, it provided film critics operating within the mainstream American press an opportunity to voice anti-war sentiments which emphasized the neo-colonial nature of the American invasion of Vietnam. Steve Ditlea of the *Barnard Bulletin* labelled the film as "one of the most effective statements against United States involvement in Vietnam", noting that "the outcome of the film, overthrow of foreign rule despite military victory, can only be seen as a lesson for our own time" (2). *The News Journal* in Wilmington Delaware emphasized that the film's local premiere "coincided with the October Moratorium, and some members of the audience arrived wearing armbands following the evening demonstration", before concluding the "to them, the film about Algerian revolution with its grim reconstruction of mass and individual death was perhaps even more relevant than for others in the audience" (Kaplan, et al, 24).

However, the review which perhaps most clearly read the film as an indictment of the American invasion of Vietnam came from *The Gazette and Daily* in York, Pennsylvania. In this review, the author asserted that the film "makes crystal clear the nature of the fundamental error in thinking an in policy which these days has brought about and continue to bring so much grief into the world", suggesting that the film could have alternatively been called "The Battle of

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[29] See: Adams, 1968; "Battle of Algiers", 1968; Dorn, 1968; Ebert, 1968; Ebert, 1969; Ebert, 1969; Geurnik, 1970; Kaplan, et al, 1969; Kaufman, 1970; Mootz, 1968; "Movies", 1968; "Screen", 1968; Terry, 1968; and Wilson, 1968.

Vietnam" or "The Battle of Saigon" (16). The reviewer furthermore clearly articulated their anti-war analysis of the film in terms which emphasize the issue of national sovereignty and position the American military as a neo-colonial presence in both Southeast Asia and beyond, writing:

> What the revolutionaries of Algiers knew was that there was no French solution possible for the situation in Algeria. There was only possible an Algerian solution. And the French in moving from efforts to impose a political solution to efforts, ruthless and brutal, to impose a military solution, where wrong, not because of strategy tactics, or whatever but because they took so terribly long to realize that any French solution, no matter what, was impossible […] The tragedy of Vietnam has been and still is the conviction on the part of the Johnson Administration and many leaders of public opinion that a United States solution is still possible in Vietnam. The tragedy of U.S. foreign policy for the past twenty years at least has been compounded from that one basic error in thinking: That there is possible a US solution to the situation in Brazil, the Congo, Thailand, or where have you. (16)

The author concluded their review by framing the film as an indictment of "misconceived US foreign policy", and asserted that it proved that "only the Algerians themselves, with all their differences, could work out the future of their country", before questioning "how much suffering, how many catastrophes […] might be avoided if only this idea could suddenly illuminate minds which are now so powerfully dark" (16)

These reviews suggest that, to a certain extent, the potential for *The Battle of Algiers* to function as an allegory for the Vietnam War provided critics operating within the mainstream press with a platform to critique American foreign policy in explicitly anti-colonial terms.

The ability for the film to function as an anti-war statement is furthermore evidenced by the fact that it was screened by many community organizations operating in both grassroots and institutional contexts. The film's premiere at the Los Feliz theatre in Los Angeles on April, 11th, 1968 was a benefit screening for the Committee for the Protection of the Bill of Rights ("Benefit Premiere Slated for 'Algiers'", 88). Its Detroit premiere at the Studio I Theatre in October of

1968 was similarly part of a two-day fundraiser for the GI Civil Liberties Defense Committee (and the Huey Newton Defense Committee) organized by the Organization of Arab Students at Wayne University in collaboration with local chapters of the Young Socialists Alliance, the Black Panthers, People Against Racism, and the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (Stark, 36; and Stark, 3). The Berkley chapter of the Organization of Arab Students similarly organized a screening of the film as part of a Third Worldist film festival "which showed films about popular struggles in Angola, Vietnam, and Palestine", and which was publicized with the tagline "Algiers, Vietnam, Palestine, Angola! Dig! Come and Relive the Battle!" (in Daulatzai, 60; and Pennock, 65). A benefit screening for the Free the Army and GI Coffeehouse in Muldraugh, Kentucky was held in February of 1970 at the University of Louisville, which was organized by Committee for Survival, "a student group that grew out of Moratorium Day activities" at the university ("U of L Bars Fund", 4). The film was furthermore screened alongside anti-war films during the UCLA student strikes in May of 1970, including *No Vietnamese Ever Called Me Nigger* (1968) and *People's War* (1970), a film produced by Newsreel in collaboration with the National Liberation Front (Murphy, 63-17). In June of 1970, the film was shown by the Claremont Movement Against the War's Liberation School, at the Garrison theatre in Los Angeles, as part of a broader "program of films, classes, lectures, and workshops on the war and its effects on democratic institutions" ("Event Listings", 457). In August of 1970, the film was included in the programming of the Rutgers Summer Mobilization, a program aimed at high school students in New Jersey, which included a lecture on "The Vietnam War and American Foreign Policy" ("Peace Program Set", 13). The Valley State College Lectures and Science Committee organized a screening of the film alongside *People's War* as part of their anti-war activism in December of 1970 ("Battle of Algiers", 283). The Long Beach Citizens for Peace also organized a public showing of the film at the Congregational Church in Long Beach, California in March of 1971 ("Advertisement", 15).

The "On Both Sides" Interpretive Protocol and the Vietnam War

However, in the vast majority of reviews on the film within either the mainstream press or film journalism, the tendency to read it as an allegory for the war generated commentary that was

decidedly ambivalent about America's presence in Vietnam. Often critics simply rehearsed the terms set by the film's promotional mandate and emphasized its relevance to the war, without providing commentary on the war itself. Moreover, claims that *The Battle of Algiers* was particularly relevant to the Vietnam War were routinely coupled with readings of the film which followed the "on both sides" interpretive protocol. Within this discursive landscape, critics often promoted understandings of the Vietnam War which also equated American military violence with the violence of North Vietnamese forces. While the "on both sides" protocol permitted critics to condemn the violence of the American military to an extent, it simultaneously allowed them to routinely remain vague about issues of national sovereignty, and inherently skeptical of North Vietnamese nationalisms.

Joseph Morgenstern of *Newsweek* asserted that the film was "irresistibly interesting in the analogies it offers to Vietnam", before emphasizing that the "terror" of the war was "indiscriminately terrible for French and Moslem alike" (102). Writing for *Film Quarterly,* Max Kozloff opened his review of the film by declaring that a "similar account of the Vietnam war" in American would be "troubling" (28). However, Kozloff clearly identified the limited extent to which he saw the film as a disruption to American nationalism by noting the film was "political exposure, but [..] not necessarily, by virtue of the fact, a partisan cry to arms" (28). Kozloff suggested that the film revealed the "resonance of anguish" in "human mutual destruction" and told audiences that "both parties to an injustice […] are hooked into a merciless circuit of brutalization" (28). After highlighting the film's relevance to the Vietnam War, Harold Clurman of *The Nation* suggested that the film sought to show its audiences that "wars are as unreasonable as they are terrible" because "they rarely achieve the benefits that both sides sincerely claim they are battling to bring about" (348). Writing for *The Boston Globe,* Marjory Adams similarly emphasized the film's relevance to the Vietnam war and claimed that *The Battle of Algiers* was "a view of troubled times the world over", before asserting that it revealed that both the Algerian nationalists and the French military "proved nothing, accomplished nothing, toward making

Algeria a better place to live in and served only to keep hatreds alive" (19).[30]

Many reviewers who emphasized *The Battle of Algiers*' allegorical function in the context of the Vietnam War also constructed the film in terms which effectively naturalized the America's presence within the region. While Harold Clurman of *The Nation* suggested that "the French had much more justification for the repression of the Algerian revolt than we have in intervening in Southeast Asia", he concluded that the picture's "true import", was that wars are "all too human" (348). Furthermore, despite claiming that war is "unreasonable", he closed his review by asserting their inevitability. He suggested that while the American audiences of *The Battle of Algiers* "[may] pray and plan to avoid" wars, "from time immemorial they have not been avoided" (348). Clurman's attempts to naturalize and normalize war were compounded by his claim that "understanding and wisdom are impossible without an initial recognition of [the] tragic fact" of war's supposedly inherently human quality (348). Clurman went on to implicitly critiqued anti-war activism (an issue which will be discussed at length later in the chapter), by asserting that audiences "can accept" the "tragic fact" of war's inevitability "without condemning [themselves] to hopelessness, to an impotent fatalism or to a hawkish militarism" (348).

Paralleling Clurman's analysis, Max Kozloff emphasized the war as both unavoidable and obligatory, noting that both sides were "caught by the implacable logic of their situation" (28). After emphasizing the films relevance to the American invasion of Vietnam, Kozloff suggested that the actors of the Algerian revolution, and, by extension, the Vietnam War, were obliged to participate by emphasizing their involvement as a reluctant duty. Kozloff described the film as revealing the fact that "both sides commit atrocities against each other, out of all promotion to

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[30] Several other reviews follow this interpretive framework. After questioning what an "official response" would be if a similar film were made about "this country's involvement in Vietnam", Norman K. Dorn of the *San Francisco Examiner* asserted that "Pontecorvo presents both sides as caught in a brutalizing rise of violence" in which "the mounting atrocities - perpetrated by both sides - pile casual horror upon casual horror" (142). In another review published in the *San Francisco Examiner,* the author introduced the film by suggesting that its "parallels with the American activity in Vietnam [were] irresistible", before concluding that "the viciousness - on both sides - of guerrilla warfare is stressed" ("Screen", 177). Bob Guerink of *The Atlanta Constitution* declared that "some American film-maker is going to make an American political film like it" in response to the Vietnam War, before suggesting that the film makes it impossible to distinguish "good guys from bad, fascism from democracy" (17). Roger Ebert similarly opened his review of the film by asserting that "it is about the Algerian war, but those not interested in Algeria may substitute another war" as *The Battle of Algiers* has a "universal frame of reference" ("Battle of Algiers"). He then went on to suggest that "Pontecorvo has taken his stance somewhere between the FLN and the French", and that the director was "neutral", "concerned with both sides", and "aware" of the fact that "bombs cannot choose their victims" and that "everyone fighting a war can supply rational arguments to prove he is on the side of morality" ("Battle of Algiers").

their instincts in any other context" (28). John Simon similarly emphasized that the film was "particularly meaningful for the United States today" before constructing the French paratroopers as figures who were stuck "in an impossible situation", "[conducting] their mandatory brutality not without some regret" (374).

Kozloff and Simon's description of French military forces as reluctant participants in the Algerian war points to another problematic ramification of the critical tendency to read *The Battle of Algiers* as an allegory for the American invasion Vietnam. Coupled with the promotional template which emphasized the film's allegorical functions, the tendency amongst American distributors and critics to humanize and identify with the French that was outlined in the previous chapter effectively became endorsements of the American military by proxy. For example, Bosley Crowther's assertion that audiences would "become almost as much involved" in the film's depiction of the Algerian revolution "as [they] would if [they] were seeing a drama of the war in Vietnam today", was coupled with an interpretation of the film which emphasized the heroism and compassion of the Colonel Mathieu (Jean Martin) - in which Crowther described him as "so impressive and his attitude of regard for the cause and bravery of the rebels is so sure, even though he has to torture and kill some of them, that he does full credit to the character of Massu" (15). Several other reviews followed a similar rhetorical structure.[31]

Furthermore, within the film-as-allegory interpretive protocol, the tendency amongst American distributors and critics to construct the FLN in sensationalist and racist terms became an implicit characterization of the National Liberation Front.[32] T. Geersema of *The Kingston Daily* asserted that "to a new generation of film fans" the film "must remind them of their own views on Vietnam", before describing the Algerians as "fierce-eyed men and women of cold blood and courage, who see their fanaticism pay off" (29). Wayne Wilson of the *Van Nuys News* likewise suggested that "there is an unmistakable parallel to the plight of Algiers reported in every edition of todays' newspapers" from "the jungles of Vietnam", before emphasizing the

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[31] See: Adams, 1968; Crowther, 1967; Crowther, 1967; Dorn, 1967; Geertsema, 1968; Geurnik, 1970; and "Screen", 1968.

[32] Outside of the specific examples that will be discussed, see: Adams, 1967; Dorn, 1967; Clurman, 1967; Kozloff, et al, 1967; and Morgenstern, 1967.

"monstrous" violence of the FLN. Wilson also interestingly makes no mention of French military violence in his review of the film.

Indeed, within the context of review journalism produced over the course of *The Battle of Algiers*' initial waves of American circulation, there were clear limitations on the extent to which audiences were permitted to either critique American foreign policy or identify with North Vietnamese nationalisms. Crowther's coverage of the 1967 New York Film Festival exemplifies these discursive limitations. Crowther described *The Battle of Algiers* as "strong" and "artful", noting that "these are times when the motion picture can do much to shed strong light upon events [and] help put them in historical perspective" and asserting that the Pontecorvo "does this in a generally accurate and responsible way (X1). In comparison, Crowther labelled the omnibus film *Far from Vietnam* (1967, dir. Jean-Luc Godard, Chris Marker, Alain Resnais, Angès Varda, William Klein, Joris Ivens, and Claude Lelouch), which also made its American premiere at the festival, as "a rash polemic" and a "hodgepodge of propaganda" (X1). While Crowther partially articulated his disdain for *Far from Vietnam* in aesthetic and formal terms, his arguments against the film were firmly rooted in its overtly critical stance towards the American military, and its explicit endorsement of Vietnamese nationalisms. Crowther condemned the film for "brutally [blasting] the United States as a world power bent on discrediting forever the uprising of 'the poor' by its involvement in Vietnam" (X1). He furthermore dismissed the film for "[elevating] Ho Chi Minh" as "honorable and reasonable" (X1). Ultimately, Crowther concluded his discussion of the film by asserting that it was "without logic or persuasiveness" and that it would only be appreciated by sections of the American public who were "already emotionally inflamed against our policy in Vietnam" (X1).[33]

Thus, within the context of the Vietnam War, the "on both sides" interpretive protocol worked to forward understandings of the war which naturalized and humanized the American invasion of Vietnam, while simultaneously de-humanizing and abstracting North Vietnamese nationalisms. Over the course of its American circulation, while *The Battle of Algiers* was

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[33] Max Kozloff echoed some of Crowther's sentiments in his review of *Far from Vietnam,* which was published alongside his review of *The Battle of Algiers* in the Winter 67/68 edition of *Film Quarterly.* Where Kozloff applauded the fact that *The Battle of Algiers* was not a "partisan cry to arms", he suggested that *Far from Vietnam's* inclusion of interview footage with Ho Chi Minh was "problematical" and "extraneous" (30)

mobilized as a clear indictment of American imperialism by some, it also regularly functioned as a vehicle through which various actors could narrativize the Vietnam War in terms which normalized the presence and violence of the American military in several Southeast Asian nations.

Contextualizing the Film's Promotion and Reception within the Vietnam-Era News Media Landscape

In many ways, the discourses about the Vietnam War that were produced over the course of *The Battle of Algiers'* American promotion and critical reception mirror the broader rhetorical trends that characterized American news media coverage of the war. While both Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon claimed that negative news coverage was largely responsible for shaping public opinion in opposition to the war, and despite the now-infamous publication of the *Pentagon Papers,* many media scholars have asserted that the American press remained consistently pro-war throughout the period (Berry, 1990; Gitlin, 1980; Knightley, 2004; Hammond, 1988; Hallin, 1986; Spencer, 2006; and Wyatt, 1995). For Daniel Hallin, American journalists were indeed afforded an "extraordinary" level of freedom to "report the war in Vietnam without direct government control", noting that "it was the first war in which reporters were routinely accredited to accompany military forces, yet not subject to censorship" (7). However, Hallin simultaneously emphasizes the extent to which these shifts in war-time media policies constituted the official integration of news media outlets into the processes of the American state, wherein media became labelled the "fourth branch of government" (8). For many scholars, by the time American news media began to routinely circulate negative coverage of the war itself, American military operations in Vietnam had proven to be ineffective for years, and significant opposition to the war had already developed within both the leadership of the American military and Congress (Hallin, 1986; Hammond, 1988; Spencer, 2005).

Many scholars have outlined the extent to which the American news media remained consistently and vocally supportive of the rationale behind the American intervention in Vietnam (Hammond, 1988; Hallin 1986; Knightley, 2004; Spencer, 2006; Wyatt, 1995). The Vietnam War was initiated out of a desire to "contain the possible dangers of communism" and thus safeguard

the economic interests of "the Western alliance and Japan" in Southeast Asia (Spencer, 56). While American correspondents indeed criticized certain aspects of American military and governmental policy over the course of the War, and especially after the 1968 Tet Offensive, domestic news media remained consistent in their endorsement of the fundamental rationale behind the American invasion (Hammond, 1988; Hallin, 1986; Knightley, 2004; Spencer, 2006; Wyatt, 1995). As Phillip Knightley has noted, American war correspondents:

> …were not questioning the American intervention itself, but only its effectiveness. Most correspondents, despite what Washington thought about them, were just as interested in seeing the United States win the war as the Pentagon. What the correspondents questioned was not American policy, but the tactics used to implement that policy. (Knightley in Spencer, 59)

Indeed, Hallin asserts that the American news media remained "deeply committed to the 'national security' consensus that had dominated American politics since the onset of the Cold War, and acted as 'responsible' advocates of that consensus" (9).

In large part, the discourses about Vietnam that were circulated over the course of *The Battle of Algiers'* American promotion and reception thus parallel the broader trends of contemporaneous mainstream news media coverage of the war. Critics who framed the film as an analogy for the Vietnam War routinely voiced criticisms of French military violence, or the use of specific tactics they mobilized, such as the use of torture. However, in general, critics remained relatively sympathetic to the French position, and were equally, if not more aggressively, vocal in their condemnations of the FLN and Algerian nationalism. Furthermore, the tendency of many critics to either naturalize military violence as a timeless component of humanity, or the fulfillment of a reluctant, but mandatory duty, functions to both normalize and legitimize the American military's presence in multiple sovereign nations in Southeast Asia.

The Battle of Algiers and Broader Media Representations of the Anti-War Movement

Several scholars have furthermore emphasized the extent to which the American mainstream

media represented the domestic anti-war movement in explicitly negative terms (Gitlin, 1980; Spencer, 2006). *The Battle of Algiers*' initial waves of release corresponded with the veritable peak of anti-war activism in the United States, and indeed the film was often implicated in the American mainstream media's representations of the anti-war movement. While the issue of the film's both real and imagined relationships to leftist political organizations will be discussed at length in the following chapter on black-American radicalism, here it is important to emphasize the extent to which the film was regularly mobilized as a cultural reference point in the mainstream media's attempts to shape popular opinion on the anti-war movement.

While the previously discussed review of *The Battle of Algiers* published in Wilmington Delaware's *News Journal* highlighted that the film's local premiere coincided with the Moratorium to End the War In Vietnam, in October of 1969, and constructed anti-war demonstrators in relatively sympathetic terms (Kaplan, et al, 24), the film was often evoked in critics and journalists' attempts to portray the anti-war movement in defamatory terms.

Media theorist Todd Gitlin provides a useful theoretical framework for unpacking the role *The Battle of Algiers* played in this discursive landscape. Gitlin suggests the negative representations of the anti-war movement that were circulating in the mainstream press at the time of *The Battle of Algiers*' initial waves of American release were part of a broader and "systematic denigration of the New Left" which characterized the contemporaneous media landscape (Gitlin in Spencer, 63). Gitlin outlines several discursive trends within American news media representations of the New Left, many of which are relevant to the specific construction of the anti-war movement, and *The Battle of Algiers'* implication within these discourses.

On one hand, Gitlin, emphasizes the extent to which American news media engaged in a "trivialization" of the anti-war movement. Here, Gitlin describes how the American press routinely attempted to "make light of the anti-war movement's language, sense of dress, values, aims, and age" (Spencer, 63). On the other hand, Gitlin outlines the discursive trend of "polarization", in which the anti-war movement was constructed as threatening and "extremist" (Gitlin in Spencer, 63).

The Battle of Algiers was often implicated in both of these discursive projects. In several instances, journalists referenced the film in their attempts to construct anti-war demonstrators as

naive and impressionable, asserting that they had become radicalized due to an over-identification with the film. Furthermore, by articulating the protestor's radicalization in terms of a specific identification with the FLN, and playing on popular anxieties regarding anti-colonial revolution, journalists were simultaneously able to construct protestors as fanatical and violence-prone.

For example, in his November, 1969 coverage of an anti-war demonstration organized by the New Mobilization Committee to End the War In Vietnam in Washington D.C. for *The New York Times,* John Kifner asserted that the "violent" and "radicalized contingent" of the protestors "[gave] the ululating war whoop of the Algerian rebel women, which [they] had learned from the movie *The Battle of Algiers"* (60). Kifner goes on to repeatedly highlight the fact that protestors identified with North Vietnamese nationalism, noting that some participants wore Vietcong patches, and attempted to run Vietcong flags on flagpoles throughout the city (Kifner, 60). Here, the demonstrators' open identification with Vietnamese nationalism was in part explained as a product of their naiveté. Kifner's emphasis that protestors had "learned" about Algerian nationalism "from a movie", and indeed identified with *The Battle of Algiers* to the extent that they sought to recreate its specific representation of revolutionary dissent, helps to frame their open support for the Vietcong as a form of irrational over-identification with a film-text, rather than a legitimate expression of political solidarity.

In a rare example of journalism which remained relatively sympathetic to anti-war activism, college-student Rob Schorman opened his editorial on "violent" student-protestors in the *Warren Times Mirror and Observer* by asking:

> Why do students feel they must resort to confrontation politics in their protests? Are they just letting off steam? […] Have they all been hoodwinked by a few radical (and probably professional) leaders? Are they […] just a bunch of kids who have been overly influenced by […] the movie *The Battle of Algiers*? (1).

While Schorman ultimately concluded that the increase in confrontational tactics in campus-based protests had occurred for more complex reasons, his introduction points to the extent to

which the mainstream press attempted to construct the tactics of civil disobedience used by certain contingents of the anti-war movement as the result of their over-identification with *The Battle of Algiers.*

Similar assertions that anti-war protestors had become radicalized from watching the film were made in editorials about specific political organizations involved in the anti-war movement. The Black Panther Party, was undoubtedly the political organization that was the most routinely subject to these claims, however this issue will be explored at length in the following chapter. Outside of the Black Panther Party, the Weatherman (also known as the Weather Underground or Weathermen) were furthermore routinely subjected to these claims in news coverage and editorials on anti-war activism.

A splinter-organization of Students For a Democratic Society, the Weatherman advocated for the radicalization of the white-American left, and an engagement in anti-imperialist revolutionary praxis in solidarity with colonized peoples (Daulatzai, 58). Within the American mainstream press, the Weatherman's anti-colonial politic, and anti-war activism, was regularly understood as the product of a naive and fanatical over-identification with the Third World - one which was often described as having been facilitated by *The Battle of Algiers.* Richard Starnes of the *El Paso Herald,* claimed that the Weatherman were "violence-prone marxists" whose politics were deeply "influenced" by *The Battle of Algiers* (30). The reporter went as far as to claim that members of the Weatherman were "said to have sat in hypnotic fashion through dozens of showings" of the film (30). *Time* magazine similarly reported that after watching the film "Weatherman leader Mark Rudd ordered his troops to go underground and wage their own 'Battle of Algiers'" in the United States ("Rise of the Dynamite Radicals", 17). In an editorial on Weatherman member Bern Dohrn, Saul Friedman of *The Akron Beach Journal* claimed that the organization was organized "into tiny groups of three to five", a strategy they modelled after the "revolutionaries in the film *The Battle of Algiers*" (10).

It is important to emphasize the extent to which the film's distributors both endorsed and knowingly played on these broader characterizations of the anti-war movement over the course of *The Battle of Algiers*' American promotion. The full extent of Allied Artists' attempts to promote the film by engaging with sensationalist and alarmist popular discourses regarding the American

Third Worldist left will be explored more fully in the following chapter. However, it is furthermore apparent that, in part, Allied Artists' promotional campaigns for the film directly evoked the mainstream media's construction of anti-war activism.

A 1970 press release from Allied Artists entitled "Getting Bigger! Book It Now!" features a reprinted version of a *New York Times* article on the film by Michael Kaufman (see Fig. 10). In this article, Kaufman describes a screening of the film in New York which was attended by "a mostly youthful audience that has made [*The Battle of Algiers*] something of a cult fetish" (22). He furthermore noted that these "young" and "callous" attendees "[laughed] and [applauded] when bombs planted by Algerian women destroyed restaurants frequented by the French" (22).

Kaufman's depiction of the audience of the screening as young, fanatical (in their embrace of the film as a "cult fetish"), and violence-prone parallels the discursive trends outlined by Gitlin. Indeed, Kaufman went on to directly extend this characterization to the anti-war movement itself, asserting that "the banshee-like cries of the Algerian women have been copied at mass demonstrations throughout the country" (22). He furthermore claimed that Mark Rudd, "one of the founders of the Weatherman faction of the Students for a Democratic Society, once cited the film as a rationale for his politics" (22).

Conclusion

As a pseudo-dramatization of the Vietnam War, *The Battle of Algiers* filled an important gap within the Vietnam War-era media scape. Within this context, the specific protocols of interpretation that were endorsed by Allied Artists had multiple and varied effects. In some instances, they created space for film critics to articulate anti-colonial critiques of the American invasion of Vietnam within the mainstream press. The significance of this aspect of the film's legacy of distribution within American film-markets should not be understated, as many media scholars have suggested that there was little to no room for this kind of critique to be made within the contemporaneous American mainstream mediascape. Furthermore, the film was mobilized by a variety of anti-war activists operating in both grassroots and institutional contexts. Thus, to a certain extent, the film was mobilized according to the intentions of its various creators, who had hoped that the film would be use to garner internationalist solidarity in the global struggle against

imperialism.

On the other hand, in many instances, the specific promotional strategies and protocols of interpretation that were promoted over the course of the film's initial waves of American circulation worked to naturalize and rationalize the American invasion of Vietnam. By positioning the film as an allegory for the Vietnam War, many critics extended the "on both sides" interpretive framework for understanding the film's images of anti-colonial revolution to contemporaneous American foreign policy. This discursive strategy resulted in many reviews of the film which worked to humanize American military violence, while abstracting and demonizing North Vietnamese forces. In this way, the "on both sides" interpretive framework functioned to malign questions of national sovereignty in relation to the Vietnam War, and effectively police the extent to which American spectators were permitted to identify with Vietnamese nationalisms. The film's evocation by many journalists in the context of news coverage of anti-war demonstrations, and editorials on anti-war activism, similarly worked to position an identification with anti-colonial nationalisms as fanatical and irrational. Thus, many of the discourses that were used to promote *The Battle of Algiers* to American audiences neatly coincided with the broader pro-war rhetoric that characterized the Vietnam War-era mainstream American mediascape.

Chapter Three:
Fear of a Black Spectator: The Promotion and Reception of *The Battle of Algiers* in the Era of COINTELPRO

It has become somewhat commonplace for scholars and critics to emphasize the fact that *The Battle of Algiers'* initial release coincided with a particularly turbulent period in America's domestic political history. The film is often framed in terms of its embrace by various factions that composed the so-called "radical left" of the 1960s and 70s, and explicitly associated with anti-colonial political organizations operating in the American context, such as the Weatherman and the Black Panther Party. What has been largely left out of scholarship on the film, is any analysis of the film's relationship to the large-scale counter-intelligence initiatives that were being enacted by various bodies of the American government throughout the period.

In this chapter, I will explore the ways in which the film's American release coincided with the FBI's Counter-Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO)'s initiative to shape popular understandings of various sectors of the U.S.-based Third World left. I will outline how the marketing strategies employed by Allied Artists directly played on the sensationalist anti-leftist discourses that were endorsed and promoted by COINTELPRO. Throughout the films' initial waves of American circulation, distributors and critics increasingly framed the film as a "blueprint for revolution" and a source of knowledge regarding the supposed threat that leftist-inspired acts of domestic terrorism posed to the American public.

I have elected to organize my analysis of this particular aspect of the film's American legacy around the Black Panther Party for two inter-related reasons. First, the Black Panther Party was perhaps the domestic political organization that was most intensely subjected to the FBI's Counter-Intelligence operations. For Ward Churchill, while COINTELPRO initiatives targeted "every dissident group in the United States" during the period, the offensive against the party constituted, "a campaign of political repression that in terms of its sheer viciousness has few parallels in American history" (78). The second reason that I have elected to focus on the Black Panther Party is related to the legacy of *The Battle of Algiers* itself. While the film has been routinely associated with several anti-colonial political organizations, the Black Panther Party has

perhaps remained the most consistent reference point in the journalism, cultural criticism, and scholarly research that has been produced over the course of the film's American circulation. Claims that the Panthers "studied" the film in the development of party directives regarding urban guerrilla warfare have been regularly mobilized by distributors, critics, and scholars alike, in an effort to account for the film's cultural and historical significance. In this chapter, I will illustrate the ways in which discourses produced over the course of *The Battle of Algiers'* American circulation have often worked to forward a vision of the party that ultimately affirms much of the anti-Panther rhetoric generated over the course of the COINTELPRO-BPP initiative. I will furthermore reflect on the methodological implications this legacy holds for media scholars who are attempting to conduct research that must engage with the intersections between commodity-culture and revolutionary praxis.

COINTELPRO-BPP

The Battle of Algiers' American release coincided with the veritable peak of the FBI's Counter-Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO). Initiated in 1956, with the initial aim of containing the growth of the US Communist Party, over the course of the 1960s the COINTELPRO project would expand to target wide spectrum of political organizations who composed the "New Left" (Churchill, 80). Within this expansive counter-intelligence project, individuals and organizations associated with either the civil rights movement or black-nationalisms were subject to heightened surveillance and intervention (Churchill, 80). Churchill notes that, Martin Luther King Jr, Elijah Muhammad, Stokely Carmichael, Chandler Owen, Jesse Owens, and A. Phillip Randolph, amongst others, had been "subjected to the attentions of the FBI simply because they were deemed 'defiantly assertive [about] the Negro's fitness for self-governance" (FBI in Churchill, 79). By 1968, a specific initiative entitled "COINTELPRO-Black Nationalist Hate Groups" had been "expanded to include all forty-one FBI field offices", investigating "all black-owned newspapers" and "racial advancement groups" including the National Negro Congress, the NAACP, the Congress of Racial Equality, the SCLC, the SNCC, Revolutionary Action Movement, and the Nation of Islam (81).

However, for Churchill, the Black Panther Party was the organization most routinely and intensely subjected to FBI counter-intelligence operations. Churchill asserts that the offensive against the party constituted, "a campaign of political repression that in terms of its sheer viciousness has few parallels in American history" (78). He notes that out "of the 295 counterintelligence operations the bureau has admitted conducting against black activists and organizations [during the late 1960s], a staggering 233, the majority of them in 1969, were aimed at the Panthers" (82). Indeed, in November of 1968, F.B.I director J. Edgar Hoover ordered the initiation of "imaginative and hard-hitting [counter]intelligence measures" that were specifically "designed to cripple the BPP" (Hoover in Churchill, 82). Furthermore, in January of 1969, Hoover initiated a "considerable expansion and intensification" of the department's efforts to "destroy what the BPP stands for" (Hoover in Churchill, 83).

Churchill outlines the extensive range of initiatives that the FBI undertook as part of COINTELPRO-BPP, including, but not limited to: routine raids of party chapters across the country; the sabotaging of the party's various community-based "survival programs"; mass infiltration of party chapters with the explicit intent to "exacerbate intergroup tensions" and prevent the development of coalitions"; the active pursuit of fraudulent prosecutions against party members; and the assassination of party members (101-106). However, perhaps the most relevant aspect of the COINTELPRO-BPP initiative to the distribution and reception of *The Battle of Algiers* is the extensive "media offensive" that the FBI engaged in over the course of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Churchill outlines the "developed network" of over 300 "cooperative journalists" that the FBI enlisted in their attempts to circulate anti-Panther propaganda within print, television, and radio-based American news media (84). According to Churchill the explicit aims of the FBI's media offensive was to circulate disinformation that would "discredit the Panthers before the public both personally and organizationally" and thus "[isolate] them from potential support" (78). The FBI's media offensive against the party was organized around the circulation of three "primary themes": that the party was "violence-prone", that they were primarily a criminal rather than political organization, and that "those associated with it were of a uniformly 'low moral caliber'" (FBI in Churchill, 84).

Promoting *The Battle of Algiers* as a "Blueprint for Revolution"

In many ways, the American promotion and reception of *The Battle of Algiers* became effectively interlaced in the broader media offensive against the Black Panther Party, and the broader black-liberation and New Left political movements. In part, *The Battle of Algiers*' affiliation with the black-liberation movement is the result of its actual uptake by political organizations and initiatives like the Black Panther Party (an aspect of the film's American legacy that will be discussed at length later in the chapter) and the internationalist anti-colonial politic that is undoubtedly imbedded within the film-text itself.). However, it is simultaneously important to emphasize the extent to which the film's American distributors encouraged and knowingly played on its anti-colonial vernacular in ways which served multiple, and often conflicting, political agendas. While the film was indeed mobilized by the Black Panther Party and other sectors of the American Third World left, in many ways, the promotional strategies pursued by the film's American distributors constructed the film in terms which contributed to the ideological projects of COINTELPRO-BPP.

Indeed, the 1968 Allied Artists campaign manual explicitly encouraged exhibitors to market the film to black-Americans, and other racialized communities (see Fig. 8). In the section entitled "These Ideas Will Sell Tickets!" the manual notes that:

> In addition to the broad appeal of *The Battle of Algiers,* its story of one of the most newsworthy and significant revolts of modern times places the film in a unique category. It makes *The Battle of Algiers* of special particular interest to minority groups and the organizations involved with their objectives and concerns. (5)

As such, the manual instructed exhibits to "schedule ads and hand-plant stories in local Negro publications and foreign-language newspapers", and to pursue "advertising and promotions on Negro and Spanish-speaking radio stations" (5). The manual furthermore instructed exhibitors to screen the film to stakeholders who are "diversified as to background and affiliation", including the "heads of local political organizations" (5).

Over the course of *The Battle of Algiers'* American circulation, this initial prompt to

promote the film in black-American, and other racialized communities, developed into a promotional strategy that more overtly played on popular anxieties regarding the black-American nationalisms, and other domestic Third Worldist movements. Indeed, much of the discourse generated over the course of *The Battle of Algiers'* initial waves of American distribution and critical reception neatly fit into the ideological imperatives of COINTELPRO.

After acquiring the American distribution rights for the film, Allied Artists initially pursued an advertising campaign which promoted the film with the tagline "the revolt that stirred the world!" (see Figs. 3 and 6). Accompanied by images of a face-off between a tank and an anonymous crowd, the advertisements evoked the possibility of pending revolution. However, by 1969, Allied Artists began to advertise the film in a way which more directly played off of popular anxieties surrounding black-American militancy. In October of 1969, advertisements appeared in multiple newspapers including *The Arizona Republic*, *The Petaluma Argus-Courier,* and *The Press Democrat* with a tagline which framed the film as a "Blueprint for Revolution" (see Figs. 11 , 12, 13, and 14).

The "Blueprint for Revolution" tagline can, in part, be understood as a response to American film critics' initial reactions to *The Battle of Algiers*. After the film's US premiere at the New York Film Festival on September 20th, 1967, many critics promoted readings of the film as an analogy for contemporaneous American race-politics. Writing for the *Los Angeles Times,* Charles Champlin asserted that the film contained a strong "metaphoric relevance to the racial disorders in the United States" (59). Joseph Morgenstern of *Newsweek* described the film as "irresistibly interesting in the analogies it offers to […] America's racial strife" (102). Noting that the subtitles at the New York Film Festival screening translated "Casbah" into "ghetto", a *Barnard Bulletin* film critic suggested that metaphorical readings of the film in relation to American race-politics were "inevitable" (2). Max Kozloff of *Film Quarterly* endorsed a similar analogy, describing Algiers as "a densely populated city even more rigidly segregated than most any American metropolis", and that in its "filth, poverty, and overcrowdedness" the Casbah constituted a "slum, about as exotic and glamorous as Harlem" (65).

In many instances, the connections critics drew between the film and contemporaneous American race politics moved beyond the simple observation of the parallels between the

material conditions of black-Americans and the film's depictions of the Algerian people living under French colonial occupation. Critics responding to the film's American premiere were quick to construct the film as a kind of pseudo-prophecy of an impending black-American insurrection. Many reviewers directly referenced the film's relevance to the uprisings which had taken place in primarily black-American neighbourhoods in Detroit and Newark over the summer of 1967.[34] Indeed, in his review of the film for *The Harpers Monthly,* Robert Kotlowitz argued that *The Battle of Algiers* reveals that "the tactics of terrorism […] are standard", and that "having also seen the violence of our own 1967 summer of film" American audiences "are learning to believe it" (133). *Film Quarterly*'s reviewers made a similarly ominous conclusion, writing, "who is to say that *The Battle of Algiers* will not provide a cinematic primer for what is to happen in American cities in the near future?" (Kozloff et al, 28).

It is apparent that *The Battle of Algiers*' images of anti-colonial revolt triggered many film critics' anxieties around American race-relations. These anxious reactions to *The Battle of Algiers* were furthermore routinely articulated in terms of the films' imagined capacity to influence and provoke black-American audiences. *Newsweek* critic Joseph Morgenstern concluded that the film evoked "frightening [responses]" from "many young Negroes" who attended the New York Film Festival premiere, who "cheered or laughed knowingly during each terrorist attack on the French, as if *The Battle of Algiers* were a textbook and a prophecy of urban guerrilla warfare to come" (102). Morgenstern was by no means alone in his rather sensationalist conclusion that the film could be studied by would-be insurgents. Writing for the *San Francisco Examiner,* critic Normal K. Dorn asserted that *The Battle of Algiers* "might be a handy-dandy size text on guerrilla warfare" (142). *Time* magazine suggested that the film "could serve today as a blueprint for revolutionists" ("Festival Attraction, Side-Show Action", 4). T. Geersema of *The Kingston Daily* corroborated *Time* magazine's claim, but elaborated on the film's potential to function as a "blueprint" in ways which reproduce the explicitly racialized dimensions of Morgenstern's review (29). The paper claimed that "during the film's lengthy run in Manhattan, it played to constantly full houses with the majority of the audience always black", for whom the film's depictions of "rebels shooting police, police retaliating with arrests and executions, and

[34] See, for instance: Crowther, 1967; Crowther, 1967; Geertsema, 1968; and "The Battle of Vietnam", 1967.

individual acts of violence supplemented by bombings, in which women joined" must have seemed like "their own lives recreated and their own fates forecast" (29). The review concluded by suggesting that the film "sums up [the] epoch - an epoch lived by intense, fierce-eyed men and women of cold blood and courage, who see their fanaticism pay off" (29). Roger Ebert furthermore emphasized that he "[shared] Morgenstern's concern" regarding black-American spectatorship of the film (32).

These reviews anticipate the "blueprint for revolution" tagline, and as such they help to uncover some of the ideological roots of the marketing strategy. Furthermore, an Allied Artists poster for *The Battle of Algiers* reveals the extent to which the "Blueprint for Revolution" promotional campaign specifically hinged on anxieties around black-American spectatorship of the film (see Fig. 15). Sourced from the Criterion Collection's DVD box-set of the film, the date of the poster is unknown. However, the poster's direct references to Eldridge Cleaver and Timothy Leary suggest that it was produced after Leary escaped from a California prison and arrived in Algiers under Cleaver's sponsorship in September of 1970. The poster is organized around an image of a black-man's face. The reflective lenses of his sunglasses reveal the object of his gaze as Ali La Pointe, gun in hand and immersed in flame. This imagery directly evokes film critics' alarmist rhetoric surrounding black-American identification with the film's images of anti-colonial violence, and the possibility of the film to function as a "blueprint" for a coming black-American insurrection. Moreover, the poster's tagline, which interpellates potential audiences with the provocation, "Eldridge Cleaver has seen it - have you?", works to directly associate this anonymous black-American figure with the Black Panther Party.

Furthermore, the posters' evocations of J. Edgar Hoover works to firmly situate the film within the discursive landscape of the COINTELPRO-era.[35] Circulating in a social and political context in which Hoover had publicly declared the Panthers to be "the greatest threat to internal security of the country", the Allied Artist's "blueprint for revolution" promotional campaign sought to directly play on anxieties regarding the supposed threat that black-American nationalisms posed to the security and well-being of the American public (Churchill, 81. Indeed,

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[35] The tagline "J. Edgar Hoover has seen it - have you?" was also used in a series of advertisements for the film in the *The San Francisco Examiner* in September, 1971 (see Figs. 16 and 17)

a 1970 Allied Artists press release entitled "Getting Bigger! Book It Now" (see Fig. 10) features a re-print of an article about the film originally published in the *New York Times.* In this article, Michael Kaufman emphasizes the fact that the film "has been adopted by certain radical groups in this country as a model- if not of urban guerrilla theory, then at least of revolutionary élan", and that "both the FBI and the Army have shown the film to intelligence operatives" (22). Kaufman furthermore emphasizes the threat of insurrection by noting that "there was laughter and applause when bombs planted by Algerian women destroyed restaurants frequented by the French" and that "at one point a cry of 'The United States is next!' rang through the small movies house" (22). It is clear that throughout the film's initial waves of American circulation, film critics, distributors, and theatre-owners capitalized on the promotional potential of framing the film in terms around anxieties around black-American political organizing that were institutionalized and promoted throughout the COINTELPRO-era.[36] Indeed, the direct relationship between this particular aspect of the film's political mythologization and its exchange value is expressed in the Kaufman review which was re-printed in an Allied Artists press release. Kaufman concluded his review by suggesting that while the film initially "drew moderate audiences", its uptake as a "textbook" by militant groups had "steadily [improved]" the film's financial records over final years of the 1960s (22). Kaufman concluded his article by remarking that, "now [*The Battle of Algiers*] is almost always being shown somewhere" (22).

The Battle of Algiers in COINTELPRO-era News Media

Within the context of COINTELPRO, the sensationalist rhetoric which characterized *The Battle of Algiers*' American promotion and critical reception had significant social and political impacts. Following the logic outlined in the Allied Artists campaign manual, which encouraged exhibitors to "capitalize in every way possible on the fact that [the film] is as hot and provocative as today's headlines" and pursue cross-promotional potential with local news media (5), over the course of

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[36] Alongside Allied Artists' "blueprint for revolution" tagline, *Los Angeles Times* critic Kevin Thomas' claims that *The Battle of Algiers* "offers both an inspiration and a warning to American audiences", became a popular pull-quote in the film's promotion. Originally accompanied by Thomas' assertion that if handled incorrectly, "[riots]" in black-American neighbourhoods could transform into "all-out guerrilla warfare", Thomas' claims were regularly mobilized as a tagline for the film in the *Los Angeles Times* movie listings throughout 1968, and were furthermore incorporated into a series of advertisements for the film's run at the Los Feliz theatre in December of 1969 (see Fig. 18)

late 1960s and early 1970s, the film's mythology made its way out of the specific realms of film promotion and criticism and into several news reports and editorials on either the Black Panthers specifically, or the American Third Worldist movement more broadly. Within the mainstream American press, *The Battle of Algiers* functioned as a highly visible cultural reference point that commentators could evoke in order to forward a vision of the contemporaneous political landscape as one plagued by a growing threat of domestic terrorism and insurrection.

On July 26th, 1968, *New York Magazine* writer Jimmy Breslin appeared on ABC News to report on the "Glenville Shoot-Out". During this incident, which had occurred only three days before Breslin's appearance, Cleveland police raided the headquarters of The Black Nationalists of New Libya. The raid escalated into an armed confrontation, in which three police officers and three suspects were killed (Miller and Wheeler, 196). The raid and "shoot-out" triggered an uprising within the predominantly black-American neighbourhood of Glenville, an event which was commonly referred to in the American poplar press as the "Glenville Riots" (Miller and Wheeler, 196).

In this televised news report, Breslin echoed many of the anxieties that had previously been expressed by critics who attended the film's American premiere. Breslin suggested that *The Battle of Algiers* was being "studied" by black-Americans en masse, and as such, it was contributing to the rise of black-American militancy - a phenomena which was furthermore constructed as a growing threat to American national security. He began his segment by noting that in order to see the film he "had to stand in a long line of people, most of them black" (in Shippy, 8). Breslin's anxiety around these black-American spectators stemmed from his belief that "the black people in the audience didn't watch the film [-] they studied it" (in Shippy, 8). Breslin noted that the Continental Art Theatre, where he viewed the film was only "six blocks away from the place where police men were killed in an ambush" carried out by "guerrilla snipers, not kids looting television sets" (8). The commentator's fears regarding a supposedly increasingly militarized black-American public culminated in his concluding remarks, which amounted to a warning explicitly directed at white-America:

> If this is the turn that violence in urban ghettos is taking then there's no way to measure the trouble we are in […] All the warnings we've had may be materializing. We've ignored all the writings and speeches and Kerner Reports. In the meantime, fiery people in the ghettos were studying *The Battle of Algiers.* (8)

Echoing Breslin's concern, *Philadelphia Daily News* reporter Pete Hamill asserted that armed confrontations between civilians and individuals in "Philadelphia, Chicago, and half a dozen other American towns" prove that "guerrilla warfare is [now] a reality" in the United States (18). While it is unclear to which other locations or events Hamill was referring, his editorial was likely written in response to the Philadelphia shootings which took place in August of 1970, in which a group of people reportedly linked to the Black Unity Council shot four police officers, injuring three and killing Sgt. Frank Von Colln. Furthermore, the Chicago events Hamill referenced were likely those which took place over the course of the summer of 1970, in which several armed confrontations occurred between police and residents of the Cabini-Green housing projects during a period of heightened police surveillance and raids in the area. Despite the fact that these events were in no way tied to a specific political organization or movement, Hamill suggested that they constitute the initiation of "*The Battle of Algiers,* American-style" (18).

Leyor F. Aarons articulated a similar vision in his coverage of the Marin County Courthouse shootings for the *Washington Post,* reprinted in the August, 17th, 1970 edition of the *Democrat and Chronicle.* Aaron's article details the armed confrontation in which Jonathon Jackson attempted to free George L. Jackson, Fleeta Drumgo, and John Wesley Clutchette from police custody, who were popularly referred to as the "Soledad Brothers". By the time of the shooting, a large-scale campaign had been organized by several political organizations to free the three men, who many believed had been framed for the murder of a guard in Soledad prison.[37] Aarons described the shootings in explicitly cinematic terms, arguing that while "the bloody escape at the Marin County courthouse [initially] seemed like a daring, movie land-style prison

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[37]Several digitized documents produced by the Soledad Brothers Defense Committee have been made available by the Freedom Archives. The Marin County Courthouse shootings were furthermore the events that led to Angela Davis' later arrest and trial, as Jackson used a gun which Davis had purchased. Davis was eventually acquitted of all charges. These events are discussed at length in both Min S. Yee's *The Melancholy History of Soledad Prison: In Which a Utopian Scheme Turns Bedlam,* and Davis' *Angela Davis: An Autobiography.*

break with no more political significance than a Humphrey Bogart film", the events have since become "a watershed in America's progress toward its own *Battle of Algiers*" (4).

Published during the veritable peak of the COINTELPRO project, these articles point to the extent to which *The Battle of Algiers'* entry into American markets coincided with a period of pronounced cultural, social, and political anxiety around the supposed threat that black-nationalisms posed to American national security. Allied Artists' promotional campaigns worked to position *The Battle of Algiers* as a frame through which the American public could understand certain sectors of the black-nationalist and black-liberation movements' decisions to engage in armed confrontation with the police. However, within the popular press, the film was rarely, if ever evoked in an effort to forward an anti-colonial critique of the American state. Instead, it functioned as a vessel through which a handful of actions that were either specifically aimed at police, or other legal institutions of the United States, could be translated into attacks on the American public at large, and reconstructed as the inaugural events of an impending race-war. These fearful premonitions proved politically useful in their ability to legitimize the large-scale police and state repression of both black-American political organizations, and the black-American public more broadly.

Indeed, the film was furthermore evoked in several right-wing editorials which advocated for various forms of government action in the wake of the supposedly growing threat of insurrection. Writing for *The Daily Chronicle,* Paul Scott argued that sectors of the American congress who advocated for the scaling-back of the "federal government's internal security surveillance operations" should instead be supporting their escalation due to the continued threat of a "new breed" of radical leftist terrorist (6). Scott's article outlines an elaborate "four phase" plan for insurrection developed by an unspecified network of "radical groups", based on "inside information" presented to the California State legislature by the Attorney General's office (6). Scott suggested that readers watch "the widely distributed film entitled *The Battle of Algiers*", as the film "[spells] out" a "timetable" similar to the one outlined by the Attorney General (1975: 6).

Writing for the *Colorado Spring Gazette-Telegraph,* columnist H.L. Hunt mobilized the film as a rationalization for the large-scale de-funding of public services in response to the American government's supposed "financing [of] revolutionaries" (6). Hunt's editorial describes

a then recent State Internal Subcommittee hearing, in which Sgt. Robert Thomas of the Los Angeles Police Department "explained how the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), the Department of Health, Education and Welfare [(HEW)], and the Department of Housing and Urban Development have given financial aid to militant groups and individuals" (30). Hunt emphasized the systemic nature of the relationship between public funding and armed insurrection, claiming that over "$600000 in federal funds have gone to revolutionary groups in Southern California alone" (6). In order to support this claim, Hunt primarily discussed an instance in which a "HEW grant of $50,000 went to a 'student leadership program' at the University of California at Los Angeles", in which participants apparently "received training in terrorism and violence" (6). Hunt draws this conclusion from the fact that the program organized public lectures by Herbert Marcuse and Sal Castro, and a screening of *The Battle of Algiers,* which "[describes] the terrorist tactics used against the French in Algeria" (6).

Thus, once reconstructed as a "blueprint for revolution", *The Battle of Algiers* became a useful tool with which journalists and cultural commentary could catalyze reactionary fears regarding a leftist or black-American led insurgency, and promote a culture of securitization. Each of these ideological ramifications of Allied Artists' promotional strategy neatly coincided with the objectives of Hoover's COINTELPRO initiatives.

Psychoanalyzing Dissent: Naive Mis-Readings and Over-Idenitifications

The film, and specifically the Allied Artists-endorsed "blueprint" mythology, was furthermore routinely evoked by the American popular press in order to forward defamatory characterizations of both the Black Panther Party and their supporters. Paralleling the ways in which the film was mobilized in mainstream media news coverage of the anti-war movement outlined in the previous chapter, claims that the Panthers had studied the film were often mobilized as evidence of the party's illegitimacy. Here, the Black Panthers revolutionary anti-colonial politic and endorsement of armed struggle was constructed as the product of a naive over-identification with the film.

Writing for the *New York Times,* Martin Arnold claimed that *The Battle of Algiers* had become "the party's training film" (D-6). Arnold then goes on to assert that the fact that "Panthers and would-be Panthers" were "encouraged to see and study" the film, exposed the degree to

which "the party remains an organization committed to a rather simplified version of Marxism, in which the Panthers, as poor blacks, or 'lumpens' find an explanation of the ghetto conditions they know" (D-6). Arnold then concludes his article by assuring his readers that the Panthers "have not [been] very successful" as either a "revolutionary party" or in their efforts "to [run] a small thing such as a free breakfast program for children" (D-6). George Weller similarly claimed that "the best living manual of action to many Black Panthers is not any book by Che Guevara or Fidel Castro, but a movie, *The Battle of Algiers*" (35). Writing for the *Chicago Daily News Service,* Weller asserted that the film has become a "Panther guideline for urban guerrillas" precisely because it depicts "the tactics of street fighting [and] torture" which Weller's imaginary version of the party had fully-embraced (35).

The tendency to mobilize the film in an effort to perform large-scale psychoanalytic assessments of the Black Panther Party was furthermore routinely extended to elements of the radical left who supported the party or embraced similar political platforms. A particularly alarmist editorial published in the September 2rd, 1970 edition of *Time* magazine entitled "Bombing: A Way of Protest and Death", outlines a supposed upsurge in "a fearsome new brand of terrorism" across the nation (10). While the author primarily discusses incidents with no direct connection to leftist political organizations (outside of the Panther 21 trial, which is discussed in detail below), they nevertheless contend that leftists "have begun using explosives to produce sound effects and shock waves in their campaign to unnerve a society that they regard as corrupt and doomed" (10). Without providing any specific examples, the author asserts that "schools, department stores, office buildings, police stations, military facilities, [and] private homes [have all] become targets" (10). Furthermore, despite the fact that the author concedes that "fatalities have been relatively few", they assert that "one small slip [—] or one bloodthirsty bomber — could run up a death toll that could easily rival a week's total in Viet Nam" (10). The article's sensationalist and alarmist rhetoric about the supposedly growing threat of leftist terrorism aimed at the American public, is rationalized through a lengthy discussion of the psychological profiles of the "whites and blacks of the lunatic left" (10). The author asserts that "the most frightening aspect of the political bomb-throwing is the cool acceptance of terror as a tactic by […] mainly young, often college-educated" people, many of whom "are guilt-ridden offspring of middle-class

affluence (10). Lead by "black militants" who have been "devoured by despair", these two contingents of the radicalized left are imagined as sharing "an apocalyptic and conspiratorial view of society and an arrogant, elitist conviction that only they know how to reform the world" (10). The author supports these claims by characterizing the radical left as "young people" who have been overly-influenced by "examples of glamorous, if not always successful revolutionaries", and asserting that "cops in San Francisco and New York City both say that the movie *The Battle of Algiers* has influenced much of the bombing surge" (10). Writing for *The Washington Post,* Stanley Karnow similarly claimed that *The Battle of Algiers* "is widely regarded by radicals as well as law enforcement specialists […] as a guide to urban insurgency", a fact which can be understood as "a symptom of the ignorance" that plagues the left (A21).

The Battle of Algiers thus functioned as a useful reference point in mainstream journalism's attempts to account for and discredit those sectors of the American public that were either participating in, or supportive of, the various acts of civil disobedience, armed or otherwise, that were occurring throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s. The frequency with which *The Battle of Algiers* was referenced in mainstream media coverage of the activities of The Black Panther Party, or the broader American Third Worldist left, suggests the extent to which the film functioned as a highly visible cultural reference point, one which could be mobilized in an attempt to shape popular opinion about anti-colonial, anti-imperialist, and anti-capitalist political movements.

This discursive phenomenon was in part facilitated by the specific readings promoted over the film's initial waves of distribution and critical reception. The Allied Artists campaign manual clearly encouraged exhibitors to emphasize the extent to which the film "paralleled" contemporary world events (5). It furthermore noted that "these events, and the story behind them, can be discussed from a political point-of-view, in addition to psychologically" (5). It is apparent that many film critics, and indeed journalists, followed through on Allied Artists' prompt to use the film as a springboard for assessing the psychoanalytic dimensions of civil disobedience.

Furthermore, within the context of the "blueprint for revolution" marketing campaign, the "on both sides" protocol of interpretation outlined in the previous chapters functioned as a useful

means by which one could discredit the radical leftist organizations who had apparently "studied" the film, by suggesting that they simultaneously mis-read or mis-understood the text. After claiming that *The Battle of Algiers* was a "prophecy of urban guerrilla warfare to come", Joseph Morgenstern of *Newsweek* asserted that the film's "obvious intent was illumination, not incitement to riot" and that Pontecorvo "could not be blamed" if black-Americans were "on a short fuse" (102). Rogert Ebert echoed Morgenstern's sentiments in a review entitled "Violence-Lovers May Have Missed Message of Movie" (32). After noting that "it is always interesting […] when an audience takes a movie the 'wrong way'", Ebert concluded that he "[shared] Morgenstern's concern" regarding black-American spectatorship of the film (32). Ebert claimed that the attendees who applauded the FLN's acts of political violence were plagued by an "overdeveloped sense of romanticism", and asserted that "the real message of *The Battle of Algiers"* was that the "bloodshed might have been avoided through negotiations" and was "unnecessary" (32). Similarly, in his *New York Times* review that was later re-printed in an Allied Artists press release for the film, Michael Kaufman notes that "the apparent callousness of one segment of the movie's audience has drawn the condemnation of such disciples of non-violence" (22). Kaufman goes on to quote a *Playboy* interview with folk singer Joan Baez, who had asserted that "there were people in this country who saw [*The Battle of Algiers*] as a handbook for revolution", and that "in their terms, the most revolutionary act anybody can perform is to be able to blow up a roomful of people after having seen children in it" (22).

Thus, for many film critics, scholars, and journalists, *The Battle of Algiers* functioned as a useful means by which one could manage the ideological threat posed by anti-colonial political movements. In the context of its initial waves of American promotion, *The Battle of Algiers*' images of anti-colonial revolution were primarily constructed as a pacifist statement. By suggesting that radical political organizations had "studied" the film before engaging in various forms of political militancy, film critics, scholars, and journalists could delegitimize these organizations on psychoanalytic grounds - suggesting that their praxis stemmed from a naive over-identification with, and/or mis-reading of, the film-text itself.

The Panther 21 Trial

However, perhaps the most significant repercussion of the "blueprint" mythology was the film's mobilization during the infamous Panther 21 trail. On April 2nd, 1969, the homes and offices of the Harlem chapter of the Black Panther Party were raided by the New York Police Department. Twenty-one party members were arrested and charged with "186 counts of attempted arson, attempted murder, and conspiracy" to commit acts of domestic terrorism (Wahad et al, 23). Of the initial twenty-one members arrested, thirteen stood trial. Adrienne Rooney opens her insightful analysis of the trail's proceedings by listing the names and "basic biographical details" of the defendants in an effort to "avoid abstracting the individuals indicted under the Black Panther Party's organization apparatus and concomitant mythology embraced by the prosecutor" (23). Embracing Rooney's ethos, I will quote her description of the defendants at length:

> Lumumba Abdul Shakur was a 26 year old working in the Bronx at an antipoverty agency called the Elsmere Tenants Council; Richard Moore (aka Analye Dharuba), a 24 year old painter, who, while out on bail, in fact fled to Algiers in the middle of the trial; William King (Kwando Kinshasa), was a thirty year old subway-station worker and U.S. veteran; Michael Tabor (Ceteweyo), a 22 year old artist, and addicted to substances at the time of his arrest, who, while out on bail, also fled to Algiers in the middle of the trial, which became publically known during the trial; Ali Bey Hassan, was a 31 year old community worker; Alex McKeiver (Abayama Katara), an 18 year old high school student and president of his school's Afro-American History Club; Clark Squire, a 32 year old involved in drug and robbery related legal allegations already; Afeni Shakur, 22 years old and wife of Lumumba Shakur; Curtis Powell, a 33 year old biochemist working at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital; Robert Collier, 32 year old director of the Tompkins Square Community Center in Manhattan's Lower East Side; Walter Johnson (Baba Odinga), a 24 year old born in Antigua; Lee Roper (Shaba Om), 19 years old; and Joan Bird, a 20 year old student at Bronx Community College (23).

For Abu-Jamal Mumia, these thirteen people, who remained incarcerated over the twenty-six-month duration of the trail, constituted "almost the entire Harlem-Bronx chapter of the Black Panther Party" which was the "leadership" of New York City-area Panthers (in Wahad et al, 23).

Over the course of the Panther 21 trail, Joseph A. Phillips, who presided over the case on behalf of the District Attorney Frank Hogan's office, engaged in a concerted attempt to prove that the Black Panther Party had developed an elaborate bombing campaign aimed at "police precincts, schools, [and] department stores" across New York City, and the New York Botanical Garden (Wahad et al, 23). The District Attorney sought to construct the Panthers as a "fairly large group of fanatical, well-disciplined, well-trained urban guerrillas" who were engaged in an insurrectionary offensive aimed at the American public (Zimroth in Rooney, 23).

The District Attorney's case relied mainly on the testimonies of undercover officers who had infiltrated the party. One of these officers, Gene Roberts, claimed that, as part of his orientation into the party, he had been invited to a screening of *The Battle of Algiers,* after which party-member Lumumba Shakur had told him that the Panthers intended to carry out a series of terrorist attacks based on sequences in the film in which Algerian women plant bombs in the French quarters of Algiers (Rooney, 23). On November 9th, 1970, despite objections from the defence, Phillips screened *The Battle of Algiers* for the jury - claiming that the film demonstrated the extent to which the Panthers had been "influenced by African terrorism" (quoted in Churchill, 103). Phillips furthermore asserted that the film was "required viewing" for Black Panther Party membership, and the "blueprint" for the Panther's alleged terrorist conspiracy (quoted in "Terrorism Film in Panther Trial", 9).

It is important to note that this screening took place just over a year after the first advertisements with the Allied Artists-endorsed tagline, "blueprint for revolution" had circulated in the American press. Phillip's direct evocation of the rhetoric used to promote the film reveals the extent to which *The Battle of Algiers*' American promotion was implicated in the development of a culture of fear surrounding black-American organizing. It furthermore suggests that the District Attorney's office sought to knowingly play on, and indeed amplify, sensationalist rhetoric regarding the party that had already been well-established within American mainstream media by the time of the trial. Indeed, Ward Churchill asserts that the trail was accompanied by

"a veritable blizzard" of publicity, most of which "concentrated on the [alleged] coordinated acts of terror", rather than the proceedings of the trial itself (102). Much of the mainstream press coverage of the trail released over the Fall and Winter of 1970 focused on the screening of *The Battle of Algiers,* and rehearsed the District Attorney's claims that the Panthers' large-scale terrorist plot had been inspired by watching the film.[38]

Furthermore, while presenting the film to the jury, Phillips reproduced discourses surrounding black-American spectatorship of the film that had previously been forwarded by figures such as Breslin, Morgenstern, and Ebert. Phillips explained to the jury that the film outlines "a philosophy, a theory of revolution" that positions "terrorism" as "productive", and which suggests "that you should and can put bombs in public places" (quoted in Kempton, 272). While he assured the jurors that the film would not "make a terrorist out of anyone who is sophisticated", he compelled them to "appreciate the effect that this film is going to have on uneducated minds" - adding that the jurors had listened to recorded conversations between the defendants, and as such had an understanding of their limited levels of intelligence (quoted in Kempton, 272).

Despite the Office of the District Attorney's concerted efforts to convince the jury of the Panther's terrorist plot, Churchill notes that "it took the jury just ninety minutes to reach 'not guilty' verdicts in all 156 of the charges against the thirteen defendants who ultimately stood trial" (103). The verdict was undoubtedly due, in part, to the fact that undercover agent Gene Roberts eventually conceded that he had falsified much of his testimony. As historian Frank Donner has noted, near the end of the trail Roberts testified that:

> Lumumba Shakur had never had any dynamite to his knowledge and never gave Roberts orders to do anything but community work...there was never any agreement he knew of to place explosives at any particular department store; no one had ever agreed to place any explosives at the railroad sites; he did not recall anyone being assigned to bomb anything.

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[38] For example, see: Asbury, 1970; Donald, 1970; Flynn, 1970; Flynn, 1970; Martin, 1970; Oelsner, 1970; Oelsner, 1970; "Panther Jury May See Film", 1970; "Panther Jury Shown Film Over Objections", 1970; and "Terrorism Film In Panther Trail", 1970. The trail is furthermore mentioned in the previously discussed *Time* magazine editorial, "Bombing: A Way of Protest and Death".

(in Rooney, 17)

However, regardless of the outcome of the trail itself, allegations that the Panthers had studied *The Battle of Algiers* in an attempt to develop a campaign of domestic terrorism aimed at the American public persisted. In an essay on Pontecorvo's *oeuvre* published in the Summer 1971 edition of *Sight and Sound* magazine, David Wilson claimed that the "ambiguous overtones" of *The Battle of Algiers* caused "militant blacks" to read the film "less as a message for the Third World than as a training manual for urban guerrilla tactics" (160-161). More significantly, in her oft-cited *Filmguide to the Battle of Algiers* published in 1973, Joan Mellen claimed that *The Battle of Algiers* had been "misunderstood, particularly by the Black Panthers" who did not "[recognize] that the terrorist tactics carried out by Ali La Pointe and the others were the means not to victory, but to temporary defeat", and indeed "used it as a manual for urban guerrilla warfare" (63).

Building an Anti-Colonial Popular Consciousness: *The Battle of Algiers* in Black Panther Party Praxis

The Black Panthers did mobilize the film over the course of their organizational lifespan, albeit in radically distinct ways than those imagined by the critics, journalists, and scholars who promoted the "blueprint" mythology. A closer look at how the party actually used the film can help to elaborate on the disparities between the vision of the Black Panther Party that has been propagated over the course of *The Battle of Algiers*' American circulation, and the realities of the political organization on the ground.

It is, of course, difficult or potentially impossible to account for the entirety of the Black Panther Party's operations over the course of its brief but complex organizational history. Several historians have emphasized the significant level of autonomy individual party chapters operated with and, as such, neither a small sampling of party activity in a handful of locations, nor the directives outlined by party leadership, can be used to make substantive claims about the party's operations as a whole (Jeffries, 2007; Jeffries, 2010; Jeffries, 2018; Lazerow, 2007; Lazerow and Williams, 2008; Malloy, 2017; Martin, 21012; Peniel, 2010). Historian Sean A. Malloy cautions

that "to speak of a singular Black Panther Party is in some ways misleading, as there were often significant divisions between the party's national headquarters and local chapters as well as within and between its leadership and grassroots supporters" (3). However, available evidence on the party's operations works to debunk many of the assumptions and claims embedded in the mythologies surrounding their mobilization of the film.

The first, and perhaps the most glaring disparity between myth and reality is the overall significance of *The Battle of Algiers* to the party's development and operations. Nicholas Harrison provides some initial outlines of this problematic gap in his 2007 guest-edited issue of *Interventions,* dedicated to a reconsideration of the film's legacy. Harrison suggests that "the extent of [the film's] inspiration role" to the Black Panther Party "has often been overstated, not least by the film's publicists" (338). He points to the fact that the film is only mentioned a single time in the 2001 anthology on the party edited by Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas, *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party*.

While Harrison tempers his claim with the assertion that he has not "researched [the issue] thoroughly" (338), further investigation supports his initial hypothesis. In Judson L. Jeffries' seminal three-part historical survey of the Black Panther Party's on-the-ground operations in American cities the film is only referred to once, in a testimony that is discussed at length below. The film is not mentioned in the anthology *Look for Me in the Whirlwind: From the Panther 21 to 21st Century Revolutions,* a collection of works produced by defendants of the Panther 21 trial. Nor is it directly referenced in any of the published autobiographies or biographies produced by former Panther members that are currently available, save for a passing reference in Sam Durant's edited anthology of writings by or about former party Minister of Culture Emory Douglas, *Black Panther: The Revolutionary Art of Emory Douglas.*[39] In this text Douglas briefly mentions the film, claiming that black-Americans felt an "intense identification" with the film's depiction of the FLN (61). Douglas, however, does not suggest that the film was studied by party members in any capacity. Perhaps most tellingly, the film is not referenced a

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[39] This includes Angela Davis' *Angela Davis: An Autobiography,* David Hillard's *Huey: Spirit of the Panther,* Hillard and Lewis Cole's *This Side of Glory: The Autobiography of David Hillard and the Story of the Black Panther Party,* Bobby Seale and Stephen Shames' *Power to the People: The World of The Black Panthers,* Bobby Seale's *Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton, and* Assata Shakur's *Assata, An Autobiography.*

single time in any of the issues of the party paper, *The Black Panther - Intercommunal News Service* produced between 1967 and 1973. This relative absence of any direct references to *The Battle of Algiers* in this large selection of sources reveals that the film played a much smaller role in the party's ongoing operations than the "blueprint" mythology has suggested.

Furthermore, within the body of historical research and materials currently available on the party, the instances in which *The Battle of Algiers* is referenced outline a very different history of engagement than those that have been routinely forwarded in promotional discourses, cultural criticism, and academic research on the film. It should be clearly stated that over the course of this research, I have found no evidence to suggest that the party developed or implemented any directives in which the film was to be systematically studied to develop guerrilla warfare tactics or terrorist plots. Rather, the film was primarily used as a vehicle for public education about the realities of colonialism and imperialism, and the fostering of internationalist consciousness.

In a 2005 interview with Lewis Cole, former Chief of Staff of the Black Panther Party, David Hillard described mobile screenings of *The Battle of Algiers* organized by party chapters in Harlem, Oakland, and San Francisco:

> […] we had a truck that we had cut the side out of and put a screen into it - sort of a mobile motionpicture theater, if you can imagine it. On the side is this screen that we put. Like a bakery truck, a bread truck? […] We would pull up in the parking lot, and we would turn on our amplifiers and start making speeches, and when people crowded around at five or six when it's beginning to be dusk, we would say, 'Stick around. We're gonna show you some film.' We would show the community 'The Battle of Algiers.' We'd show them, and we would do this mobile sort of propagandizing (332)

In a 1972 interview with *Secheba,* "the official organ of the African National Congress of South Africa" - a liberation party which was then operating clandestinely in exile, Huey P. Newton corroborates Hillard's description of mobile film screenings and elaborates on their role within the party's praxis (Newton, 197). Newton described the screenings as part of a broader public

education initiative (197). He asserted that the party understood that "part of [its] role as a vanguard [was] educating the people […], orientating them and providing an understanding of the social forces that [were] in operation and the dialectics at the time" (202). For Newton, mobile film screenings provided a particularly accessible mode of knowledge dissemination that proved useful in the party's attempts to "raise the consciousness" of working-class and sub-proletarian black-Americans who were "tied up […] in their survival from day to day" (202). More specifically, Newton asserted that the film-medium provided an effective means by which the party could emphasize "the international nature of the struggle" (204). While Newton does not name *The Battle of Algiers* specifically in this interview, he notes that "we have films of the revolution that took place in Algeria", and that "the community is very impressed with that kind of thing because they can easily see the relationship between the way the French treated the Algerians and how we are treated in this country" (204).

Thus, the Black Panther Party used *The Battle of Algiers* not as a pseudo-manual for urban guerrilla warfare, but rather as a vehicle for popular education on various struggles against imperialism and the fostering of internationalist political consciousness. Newton and Hillard's testimonies furthermore suggest *The Battle of Algiers* was only one of many films shown in this capacity. Hillard describes organizing mobile screenings of "American documentary films" (332). Newton furthermore closes his interview with *Secheba* by stating that the party "would like more information about the struggle in Southern Africa", and specifically "film footage" (204). He assures the interviewee that "any pictures or film footage you can get to us […] will be shown inside the Black community, the Chinese community, the Indian community, [and] the White community" (204).

The testimonies of Hillard and Newton suggest that, despite their militant endorsement of armed struggle, the Black Panther Party's engagement with *The Battle of Algiers* paralleled that of many other political organizations, unions, or student-groups who screened the film for the

purposes of popular education and consciousness-building.[40] Indeed, in many instances, the party collaborated with other university- or community-based political organizations on events which incorporated screenings of *The Battle of Algiers* into their programming.

The film's Detroit premiere marked a collaboration between the local chapter of the Black Panther Party and the Organization of Arab Students at Wayne University, the Young Socialists Alliance, the People Against Racism, and DRUM (the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement) (Stark, 36; Stark, 3). The screening was organized at the Studio I theatre as a benefit for both the Huey Newton Defense Committee and the GI Civil Liberties Defense Committee in October of 1968 (Stark, 36). In May of 1970, the Black Panthers collaborated with the Black Students Union at Yale University to host a four-day Black Student Revolutionary Conference. An estimated 500-600 students attended the conference, during which *The Battle of Algiers* was screened alongside filmed interviews with Emory Douglas and Bobby Seale, the latter of whom was incarcerated during the time of the conference (Coltman, 10). Conference programming also included public lectures by David Hillard, Artie Seale, Elbert 'Big Man' Howard, and Ray 'Masai' Hewitt, and workshops which "dealt with such topics as revolutionary action on campus and in the community" and "revolutionary nationalism [versus] cultural nationalism" (Coltman, 10). The conference concluded with a rally at New Haven's Beaver Pond Park to commemorate the birth of Malcolm X (Coltman, 10). Similarly, in March of 1971, the party participated in a

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[40] Historian Pamela Pennock has outlined how the Organization of Arab Students organized community-based screenings in Dearborn and Detroit for "diverse working-class immigrant communities who hailed from Lebanon, Palestine, and Yemen" in cooperation with "radical Black labor groups such as the League of Revolutionary Black Workers" alongside films about Palestine produced by the grassroots film-collective Newsreel (Pennock in Daulatzai, 60). Cynthia A. Young furthermore outlines the film's screening as part of a 1974 film festival organized by Local 1199, the Hospital Workers Union, an organization which Young describes as "one of the most successful and highly visible unions in the United States" who "crafted a highly effective coalition between Old Leftists and U.S. Third World Leftists" throughout the 1960s and 1970s (Young, 38, 81-82). The film was furthermore screened by many university-based black students' organizations throughout the period, including: the Black Students Conference in El Paso organized by the National Association of Black Students in March of 1970 ("Student Group to Meet Here", 18); the National Association of Black Students Convention at the University of Texas in October of 1970 ("NABS Sets Convention for UT", 6); the Organization for Concerned Black Students' National Black Culture Week at Highlands University in February of 1971 ("Black Culture Week in Progress", 1); The Black Festival organized by the Black Progressives at Indiana University of Pennsylvania in March of 1971 ("Black Festival Due on Campus", 30); The Black World Film Festival and Symposium at Rutgers College in May of 1971 organized by the college's Department of African and Afro-American studies ("Rutgers Program Slates", 48); The Black Unity Convention in Dayton Ohio in August of 1971 ("3-day Black Unity Convention Slated, 7); The Black United Students of Akron University's E-Dul A-Dag (Coming Together) Week in November of 1971 ("BUS To Present Films, Singers", D20); and the The Third Annual Black Week sponsored by the University of Pittsburgh's Black Action Society in November of 1972 ("Being Black A State", 2)

public screening of the film organized by the New Black Generation, a student-group at C.W. Post College in Greenvale, New York. After the film, party-members addressed the crowd on the party's new directives and programs, alongside members of local chapters of the Young Lords and the Puerto Rican Students Union ("The Calendar", 69). The public and collaborative nature of these events contradict the vision of the party promoted over the course of *The Battle of Algiers*' initial waves of circulation as a primarily clandestine and fanatical terrorist network.

There is also evidence to suggest that the party screened *The Battle of Algiers* at some community-based meetings that were organized to recruit new members. In Jeffries' survey of on-the-ground Panther activity across America, Bill Elders, a Detroit-area member of the party, describes attending a screening of the film organized by the Panthers for "about forty to fifty people [from] the community" (141). After the screening party members gave attendees a "sales pitch" to join the party (Jeffries, 141). Similarly, in her contribution to the 2005 anthology *The Black Panther Party (Reconsidered),* Oakland-based party member Regina Jennings described *The Battle of Algiers* as the chapter's "orientation theme" (261). While in certain respects these testimonies support undercover agent Gene Roberts' claim that he had attended a Panther-organized screening of the film when he first infiltrated the party, they furthermore point to the absurdity of the idea that these pseudo-public events were explicitly organized as a means of developing guerrilla warfare tactics or insurgency methods.

Indeed, there is no evidence to suggest that the party leadership studied the film systematically for any purpose, let alone for the development of party directives concerning terrorist activities. As a political organization whose membership was deeply invested in the development of sophisticated analyses of the racialized dynamics of capitalism, and political praxis, the Black Panthers looked to a range of sources that greatly exceeded the level of historical or theoretical knowledge afforded by viewing *The Battle of Algiers.* As Jennings notes, while the film provided a useful tool in the "orientation" of new members, the Panthers "[studied] the revolutions of Africa and Cuba" and "the *Red Book* of Chairman Mao" (261). In the *Secheba* interview, Newton furthermore outlines that the "most important inspiration for the Black Panthers" has been the theoretical works and actions of "Fidel and Che, Ho Chi Min and Mao and Kim Il Sung, but also the guerrilla bands that have been operating in Mozambique and

Angola, and the Palestinian guerrillas who are fighting for a socialist world." (201). The depth and complexity of the Black Panther Party's political education programs has also been described by Bobby Seale in his autobiography *Seize the Time.* Seale writes:

> …members had to go to political education classes. Included was one hour of field stripping of weapons, safety and cleaning of weapons in the home, etc. Then we had one or two hours of righteous political education and study. The third area was work, coordinating various activities, and understanding the political significance of various actions we took… (202)

For readers familiar with the party's history, it may seem somewhat absurd to attempt to prove that the Black Panther Party developed political education programs or theoretical analyses which involved more than watching a single film. However, the anti-Panther rhetoric produced over the course of *The Battle of Algiers*' circulation in the COINTELPRO-era regularly attempted to delegitimize the party to such extremes that this cursory rehearsal of basic facts about the party's infrastructure becomes necessary. These brief testimonies of Jennings, Newton, and Seale provide a sobering reminder that the Black Panther Party constituted a remarkably far-reaching and well-organized grassroots political infrastructure, one which was furthermore enacted by subjects with nuanced theoretical understandings of the relationship between (neo)colonialism, class struggle, and the racial politics of the United States.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, despite the efforts of many scholars, activists, and former party members to provide access to knowledge about the party's legacy, the "blueprint" mythology has persisted into the contemporary moment. Much of the news media and cultural criticism produced in the wake of the Pentagon's 2003 screening of *The Battle of Algiers* rehearsed the claims made throughout the COINTELPRO-era.[41] In his *New York Times* coverage of the screening, Michael

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[41] The claim was also rehearsed in the coverage of Pontecorvo's death in October of 2006. See, Povoledo, 2006 and Bernstein, 2006 for examples.

Kaufman claimed that the film was "required viewing […] for radicalized and revolutionary wannabes" (WK3). While Kaufman does not name the Black Panther Party specifically, his characterization of anti-war activists of the late 1960s as "revolutionary wannabes" betrays a level of condescension consistent with the COINTELPRO-era rhetoric which sought to construct leftist political organizations as naive and misguided.

Christopher Hitchens, on the other hand, was both more explicit in his condemnation of the Black Panther Party, and more antagonistic in his rhetoric in his 2004 think-piece on the film published in *Slate* magazine. Hitchens recalled watching the film in American theatres during the time of its release, claiming that "in the audience […] there were some idiots who fancied the idea of trying 'urban guerilla' warfare inside the West itself" ("Guerillas in the Mist"). He goes on to asset that the "film had a potent toxic effect of the Black Panthers, Weathermen, Baader-Meinhof, and Red Brigade types" ("Guerillas in the Mist". He concluded his article by suggesting that "all that needs to be said about that 'moment' of the Left is that its practitioners ended up dead or in prison, having advanced the cause of humanity by not one millimetre" ("Guerillas in the Mist").

Hitchens' conflation of these four distinct sectors of a broadly defined Euro-American-based "radical" left, and his blanket dismissal of The Black Panther Party as effectively useless could be isolated to his status as a well-known leftist-turned-neo-conservative pundit. However, J Hoberman expressed a similar, if less overtly embittered, vision of the party in his 2004 article for the *American Prospect* on *The Battle of Algiers*. In this article, Hoberman claimed that the film was a "Panther primer" and a source of "Black Panther fantasy" (64). Despite the fact that Newton himself described its use-value to the Panthers in terms of its ability to teach the black-American public about anti-colonial struggles occurring outside of their immediate context, Hoberman asserts that the Panthers studied the film because it "offered invaluable instruction in the language of comminqués, organization of cells, placement of terrorist bombs, and use-value of cop killing" (64). Hoberman does not support these claims with references to either materials produced by the party, or historical research conducted on its organizational legacy. Instead, he grounds his specific vision of the party in a vague description of the Panther 21 trial, and a citation of Morgenstern's alarmist *Newsweek* article (64). Hoberman later reproduced these

claims in his book *Dream Life: Movies, Media, and Mythology of the Sixties*.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, much of the review journalism produced to promote the film's 2004 theatrical and DVD box-set re-releases by Rialto Pictures, Janus Films and the Criterion Collection organized in response to the Pentagon screening also rehearsed the 'blueprint' mythology.[42] What is undoubtedly more problematic, is the extent to which these claims have persisted in the realm of academic film studies. Several scholars have reproduced the rhetoric of distributors, journalists, and cultural critics responding to the film, not only claiming that the Panthers systematically studied *The Battle of Algiers*, but furthermore describing the rationale behind the party's imagined engagement with the film.

In *The Transparent Illusion: Image and Ideology in French Text and Film*, Rebecca Pauly emphasizes the film's "popularity with the Black Panthers as an example of urban guerrilla", claiming that the party embraced the film because it contained "a lot of valuable technical information about the organization of a terrorist movement: its pyramidal structure, ways of carrying out attacks, avoiding detection, etc." (33). Alan O' Leary and Neelam Srivastava have similarly claimed that "the Black Panthers used scenes from [*The Battle of Algiers*] for tips on how to organize their own urban guerrilla operations" (257). Stephen J. Whitfield went as far as to imply that the Harlem chapter of the Panther 21 had indeed concocted a "conspiracy to bomb five department stores in mid-Manhattan" - a "plot [which] was presumably an effort to actualize *The Battle of Algiers*" (257). He rationalizes his claim by asserting that *The Battle of Algiers* "was, after all, a film that showed how revolutionary cells might be organized, how bombs might be placed in public settings, and how policemen might be murdered to accelerate a turbulent cycle of terrorism and counter-terrorism" (256).

Thus, despite the fact that all members of the Panther 21 were acquitted of all charges, and Gene Roberts ultimately conceded that he had falsified much of the information in his own testimony, the accusations made against the Panther by the American government over the course of the trial have continued to shape and distort the Party's legacy. This suggests that while the District Attorney was ultimately unsuccessful in his attempt to incarcerate the entire Harlem chapter of the party, the trial itself remains a useful contribution to the COINTELPRO-era

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[42] See A.O, 2004; Gross, 2004; Matthews, 2011; Qureshi, 2016; and Rainer, 2004.

initiatives to construct the party as a "violence-prone" terrorist network (Churchill, 103).

Furthermore, following in the footsteps of Wilson and Mellen, many scholars have rehearsed the "blueprint" myth in an effort to assert that the Black Panther Party was misguided and naive in their attempts to develop public bombing campaigns which, in reality, didn't exist. In his 2004 interview with Saadi Yacef, Gary Crowdus claimed that "during the Sixties and Seventies, *The Battle of Algiers* was frequently screened by revolutionary organizations around the world" including the Black Panthers, before suggesting that it was "rather naive and ahistorical for these organizations to try and apply the unique Algerian experience to their own situation" (36). Yacef responded by confirming Crowdus' claim, suggesting that "one has to be very naive to try to adapt [the Algerian experience] to another group's situation" (36). O'Leary and Srivastava similarly concluded that the fact that the film's "precise depiction of guerrilla struggle […] was studied by groups like the Black Panthers" for "tips on how to organize their own urban guerrilla operations", reveals the extent to which "violence on screen can be, and often has been taken out of its complex ethical and political context" (257). While Thomas Reigler conceded that it was "difficult to determine if there was any direct nexus between viewing *The Battle of Algiers* and the evolution of insurrectionary strategy/tactics", he still concluded his analysis of the film by asserting that when "insurgent groups […] looked up to the movie as a model to follow, they committed a serious mistake: Western Germany as not Algeria, nor were the black Ghettos of the United States" (60). Riegler then directly quotes Mellen's assertion that the film was "misunderstood, particularly by the Black Panthers who have used it as a manual for urban guerrilla warfare" (Mellen in Riegler, 60).

What is particularly striking about this discursive and methodological phenomenon is the fact that these claims have routinely been made without any evidence to suggest that researchers have engaged with any of the theoretical writings, speeches, manifestos, communiqués, news media, or films that have been produced by, or in collaboration with, the Black Panther Party. Nor have these scholars felt the need to engage with any historical research that has been produced about the party over the last thirty-plus years. As was the case with much of the journalism and cultural criticism produced in the wake of the film's re-release, film scholars' claims about the party have often been left unaccompanied by citation, or supported by references to Joan Mellen

(who in turn offers no citations to support her claims about the party), Morgenstern's *Newsweek* review, news media coverage of the Panther 21 trial, the testimonies of Glen Roberts and/or the District Attorney given during the trial, or each other. In this respect, despite the party's concerted efforts to control their own media-image, and forward internationalist and anti-colonial analyses of American race-politics to a mass audience through the publication of a breadth of materials (including a newspaper that was published weekly over a period of thirteen years), they have since been effectively silenced by many film scholars researching *The Battle of Algiers*.[43]

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of this rhetorical trend is the extent to which journalists and film scholars are willing to position Pontecorvo, and indeed themselves, as figures who are more enlightened about either the historical realities of imperialism, or questions of political praxis in the context of anti-colonial political organizing, than either the leadership or more broadly defined membership of anti-colonial political organizations themselves. Irene Bignardi has claimed that, despite the fact that Gillo Pontecorvo never intended the film to function as a "cinematic manual of the techniques of urban guerrilla warfare", "*The Battle of Algiers* was viewed this way by some, even to the point of being studied by the Black Panthers for educational orientation" (14-22). Fabrizio Cilento has suggested that "the black Panthers apparently misunderstood Pontecorvo's message when they made the viewing of *Algiers* an important element in the orientation of new members, extrapolating some sequences as a manual for urban guerrilla [warfare]" (91). Nancy Virtue has similarly asserted that "by carefully cataloguing FLN guerrilla tactics in his film, Pontecorvo was not trying to teach their application in other circumstances" before citing Yacef's claim that the Black Panthers, amongst others were "naive" in their attempts to "adapt" the Algerian situation to their own (322). She then concludes her discussion of the naiveté of "leftwing revolutionary groups" by asserting that "quite often, a tactic that has been replicated is one that has already lost its effectiveness" (322).

Despite operating in an academic context, film scholars have routinely mimicked the discursive strategies employed by Allied Artists over the course of the film's initial waves of American release. In both cases, the material histories of anti-colonial revolution and political

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[43] The legacy of the Panthers' attempts to directly engage with, and at times, strategically mobilize their representations in American news media, is discussed at length in Jane Rhodes *Framing the Black Panthers: The Spectacular Rise of a Black Power Icon.*

organizing are reduced to a malleable backdrop, one which can be distorted and re-worked in order to hyperbolize the cultural or political caché of a single film-object. Whether this has been done in an effort to increase the exchange value of *The Battle of Algiers* as a cultural commodity, or to emphasize the film's cultural, political, or historical significance as an object of study, these processes have been more or less consistent in the degree to which they have worked to reify and mystify the on-the-ground realities of anti-imperialist political organizing as they have occurred in both the United States and abroad. Ultimately, this history of reification points to the extent to which marketing techniques that have buttressed the film's distribution and exhibition have influenced popular and scholarly conceptions of historical reality, and in turn, the extent to which the realities of anti-colonial revolutionary politics have been distorted and mediated to generate publicity for the film.

Conclusion

It is apparent that the many discursive trends that characterized *The Battle of Algiers* problematic uptake in the post-9/11 era have antecedents in its earliest waves of American circulation. As such, the film's Islamophobic afterlife in the War on Terror cannot be so straightforwardly characterized as a misappropriation of a piece of radical political cinema on the part of the contemporary film critics, scholars, or indeed the intelligence (and undoubtedly the public relations) branches of the Pentagon. Rather, the reactionary discourses which characterize the film's more contemporary waves of American reception constitute a re-working of the marketing strategies and protocols of interpretation that have characterized the film's initial entry into, and circulation within, American art-cinema markets.

Echoes of American film-critics' constructions of the film's Algerian characters as "fanatical" and "fierce-eyed" can be isolated in *Cahiers* critic Marie-José Mondzain's suggestion that the film "not only tells the story of a subjugated people's fight against the power dominating them, but also represents the ideology of sacrifice, an ambiguous panegyric to puritanism, and a questionable relationship to morality", and as such, bears "the mark of Muslim fundamentalism" (in Harrison, 24). Indeed, claims that the film could function as a source of inspiration to, or recruiting tool for, radical Islamic terrorists similarly recalls the anxieties around the supposed threat that colonized subjects pose to American national security that characterized the Allied Artists' "Blueprint for Revolution" promotional campaign. Furthermore, the Pentagon's re-reading of the film as an allegory for the American military's counter-insurgency in Iraq recreate the discursive dynamics that characterized the film's promotion and reception in relation to the American invasion of Vietnam. Thus, in part, *The Battle of Algiers*' consistent visibility within American art-cinema markets is not simply a testament to the film's enduring relevance as an anti-colonial statement. It simultaneously points to the film's consistent ability to function as a highly-visible, and accessible, cultural commodity that can be mobilized in the service of America's own imperialist projects.

The Battle of Algiers' ability to continually function as a source of knowledge regarding

geopolitical conflicts far outside the purview of its creators has in part stemmed from the discourses that have been used to promote the film amongst American audiences. Nicholas Harrison has asserted that, "it is easy, it seems, for a spectator to emerge from *The Battle of Algiers* with an [sic] euphoric sense of the historical impetus of the Algerian's final victory and little or no sense of the uncertainties surrounding the historical status of the 'battle' as such, within the film or outside it." (403). While this particular power of the film has regularly been attributed to its pseudo-documentary aesthetics, and proximities to the historical realities of the Algerian War of Independence, in the American context, it has also been the result of marketing campaigns and critical protocols of interpretation which have avidly promoted the film as an "eyewitness" experience of history itself. These discourses have routinely advocated for interpretations of the film and, by extension, Algerian political history, in ways which have erased, marginalized, or otherwise distorted the issues of national sovereignty and colonial violence that the film's various creators sought to address. They have also worked to emphasize the film's potential allegorical functions, allowing its supposedly exceptional techniques of cinematic realism to be mobilized according to the multiple and shifting gazes of American imperialism.

An analysis of *The Battle of Algiers*' initial waves of American promotion and reception furthermore problematizes many of the discourses that have facilitated the film's political canonization in both American film cultures and English-language academic film studies. The continued critical and scholarly affection for *The Battle of Algiers* has undoubtedly stemmed in part from the real historical and political interventions that the film has made in a global context. To a certain extent, the film's canonization is inspired by and reflects the actual political contributions it has made as a text birthed out of leftist internationalist solidarity, and as one of the first texts produced in a post-revolutionary and post-colonial context to receive large-scale global distribution. However, this legacy, like most political interventions, is complex and laced with contradictions. This research has sought to outline the extent to which the film's American canonization has also been facilitated by promotional strategies that have been rooted in the reification and distortion of the historical realities of anti-colonial revolution, internationalist Third Worldist solidarity movements, and black-American political organizing. In many

instances, the film's embrace within academic film studies has worked to reproduce and institutionalized altogether imaginary constructions of anti-colonial struggle that have been generated by private-sector actors as part of the film's marketing campaigns.

Ultimately, the political canonization of *The Battle of Algiers* in the American context has occurred primarily because the film visualizes something that many people have never experienced, know very little about, and have indeed been pushed to feel equally inspired by and afraid of: revolutionary politics. Given the often-clandestine nature of anti-colonial struggle, the American canonization of *The Battle of Algiers* has opened up a discursive space in which the historical realities of decolonization and Third Worldism could become mythologized, mystified, obscured, and often reworked in the ideological service of American imperialism.

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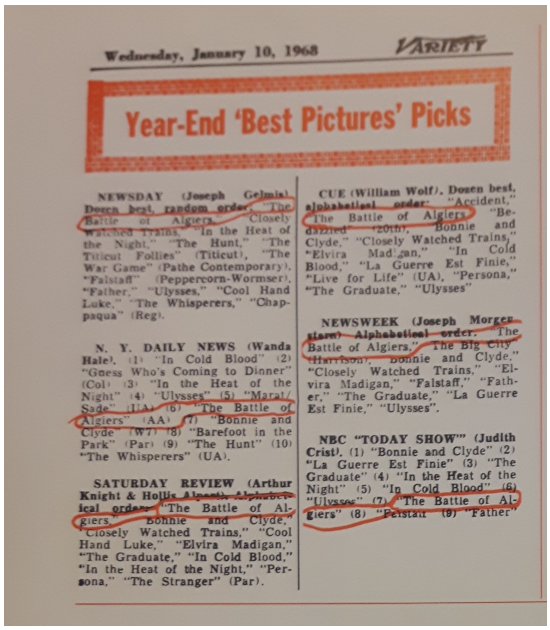
Appendix



Wednesday, January 10, 1968 VARIETY

Year-End 'Best Pictures' Picks

NEWSDAY (Joseph Gelmis). Dozen best, random order: "The Battle of Algiers," "Closely Watched Trains," "In the Heat of the Night," "The Hunt," "The Titicut Follies" (Titicut), "The War Game" (Pathe Contemporary), "Falstaff" (Peppercorn-Wormser), "Father," "Ulysses," "Cool Hand Luke," "The Whisperers," "Chappaqua" (Reg).

N. Y. DAILY NEWS (Wanda Hale). (1) "In Cold Blood" (2) "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner" (Col) (3) "In the Heat of the Night" (4) "Ulysses" (5) "Marat/Sade" (UA) (6) "The Battle of Algiers" (AA) (7) "Bonnie and Clyde" (WB) (8) "Barefoot in the Park" (Par) (9) "The Hunt" (10) "The Whisperers" (UA).

SATURDAY REVIEW (Arthur Knight & Hollis Alpert). Alphabetical order: "The Battle of Algiers," "Bonnie and Clyde," "Closely Watched Trains," "Cool Hand Luke," "Elvira Madigan," "The Graduate," "In Cold Blood," "In the Heat of the Night," "Persona," "The Stranger" (Par).

CUE (William Wolf). Dozen best, alphabetical order: "Accident," "The Battle of Algiers," "Belle de Jour," "Bonnie and Clyde," "Closely Watched Trains," "Elvira Madigan," "In Cold Blood," "La Guerre Est Finie," "Live for Life" (UA), "Persona," "The Graduate," "Ulysses"

NEWSWEEK (Joseph Morgenstern). Alphabetical order: "The Battle of Algiers," "The Big City" (Harrison), "Bonnie and Clyde," "Closely Watched Trains," "Elvira Madigan," "Falstaff," "Father," "The Graduate," "La Guerre Est Finie," "Ulysses".

NBC "TODAY SHOW" (Judith Crist). (1) "Bonnie and Clyde" (2) "La Guerre Est Finie" (3) "The Graduate" (4) "In the Heat of the Night" (5) "In Cold Blood" (6) "Ulysses" (7) "The Battle of Algiers" (8) "Persona" (9) "Father"

Fig. 1 Re-print of a *Variety* article in the first page of the Allied Artists campaign manual for *The Battle of Algiers*. Allied Artists, "The Battle of Algiers Campaign Manual". 1968. Promotional Materials Collection. Harvard Film Archive. Houghton Library, Harvard University. Accessed: 16/05/2019

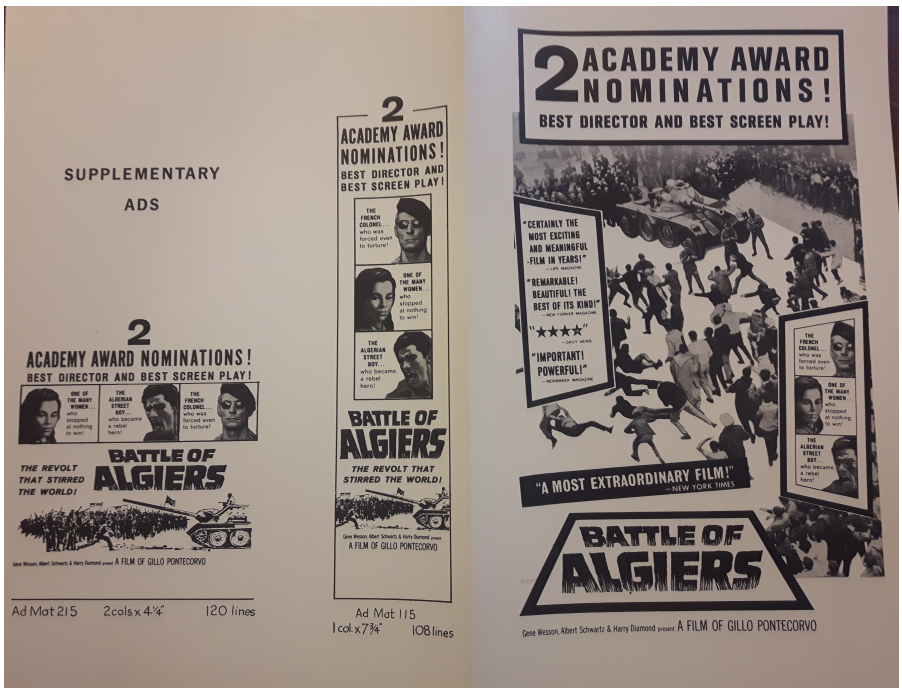


Fig. 2 Poster and advertisement templates in the Allied Artists campaign manual for *The Battle of Algiers.* Allied Artists, "The Battle of Algiers Campaign Manual". 1968. Promotional Materials Collection. Harvard Film Archive. Houghton Library, Harvard University. Accessed: 16/05/2019

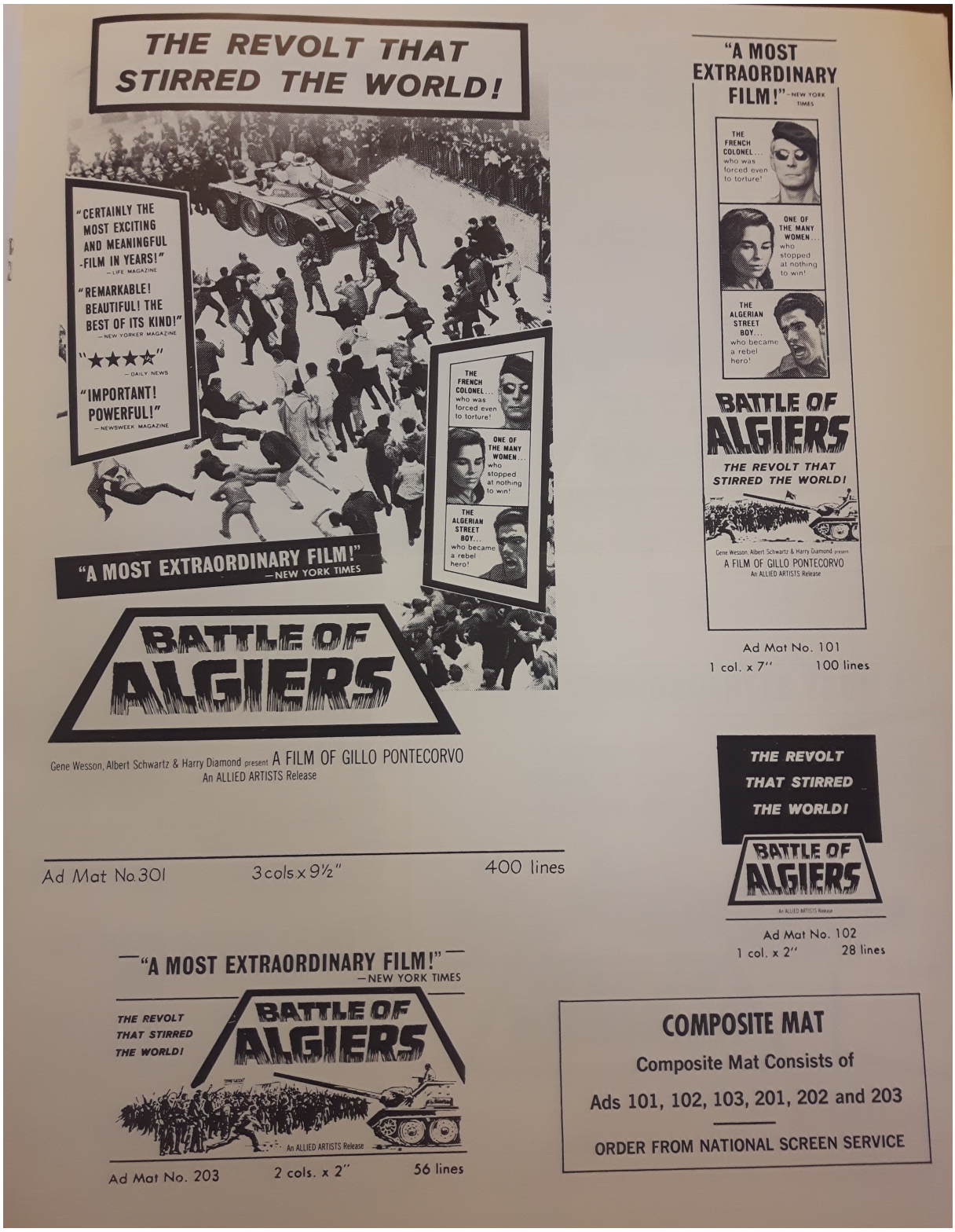


Fig. 3 More poster and advertisement templates featured in the Allied Artists campaign manual for *The Battle of Algiers*. Allied Artists, "The Battle of Algiers Campaign Manual". 1968. Promotional Materials Collection. Harvard Film Archive. Houghton Library, Harvard University. Accessed: 16/05/2019

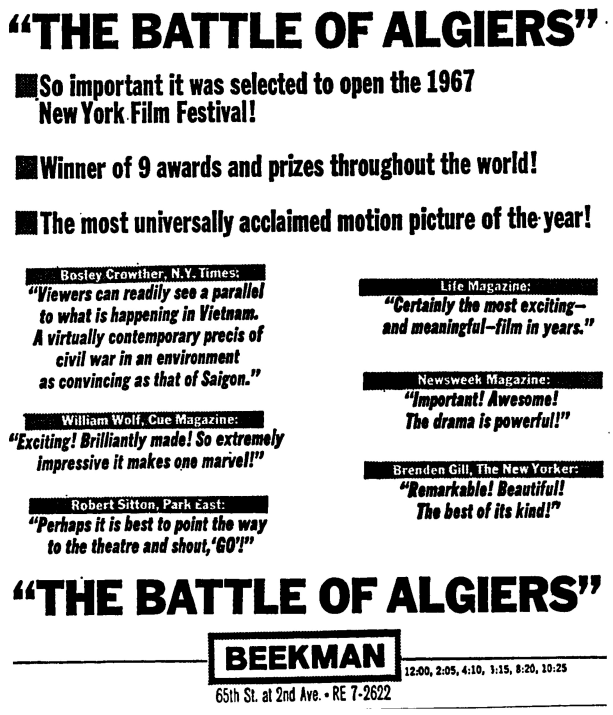


Fig. 4. Advertisement for *The Battle of Algiers* at the Beekman Theatre. "Display Ad #302 No Title" *New York Times.* 12 Nov. 1967. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times. p 143

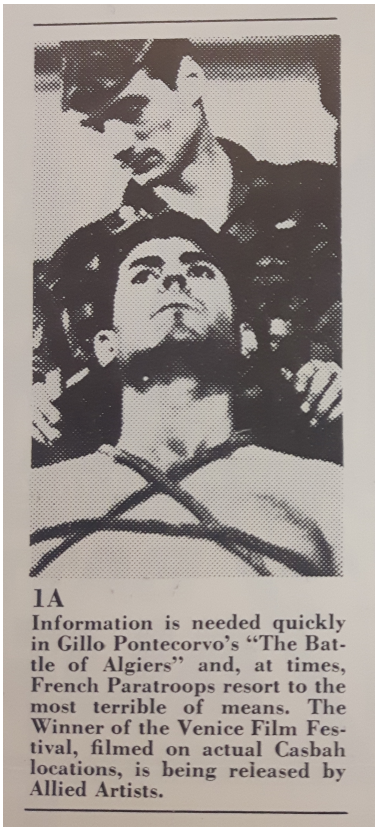


Fig. 5. Still featured in Allied Artists campaign manual for *The Battle of Algiers.* Allied Artists, "The Battle of Algiers Campaign Manual". 1968. Promotional Materials Collection. Harvard Film Archive. Houghton Library, Harvard University. Accessed: 16/05/2019

Fig. 6. Close-up of poster template featured in the Allied Artists campaign manual for *The Battle of Algiers.* Allied Artists, "The Battle of Algiers Campaign Manual". 1968. Promotional Materials Collection. Harvard Film Archive. Houghton Library, Harvard University. Accessed: 16/05/2019

LIFE MOVIE REVIEW

October 27 1967

High Drama in a History Restaged

THE BATTLE OF ALGIERS

The lighting is flat, the film grainy, the voices crudely dubbed and some of the English subtitles unreadable, but who cares? *The Battle of Algiers* is certainly the most exciting—and meaningful—film of recent years. It comes in a period in which major movies dazzle us with technical perfection and minor ones shake us up with stylistic and thematic derringdo. *Algiers* is a welcome triumph of solid content over style and technique. Or so it first seems, until we recognize that what we thought was lack of technique is actually a daring technique in itself, a technique which allows the content of the film to come across with force and effect. This, in case you've been hearing different lately, seems to me the prime function of technique in any work of art.

Gillo Pontecorvo gives us a filmed re-creation of incidents and people in the Algerian struggle for independence from 1954 to 1957. Though reenacted, so real is his panorama of people and events that he must begin with a titled disclaimer: "NOT ONE FOOT of newsreel or documentary film has been used." And not since Orson Welles's scratchy fake newsreel footage in *Citizen Kane* has this pretense of reality—Pontecorvo's aim as it was Welles's—been so dramatically arousing in a theatrical film.

There are actors, but there is no "acting." The dialogue is expository, sentiment is avoided. We are, quite correctly, less concerned with people as individuals than with their part in the broad sweep of events we witness. The subject is history, not movie stars, but Mr. Pontecorvo is interested in what history *does* to people and he tells this so straightforwardly that acts of violence which might be repugnant by normal standards can be watched with detachment if not understanding.

Algiers appears to be one of the most objective movies ever made and yet it isn't objective at all. We know where Mr. Pontecorvo stands from the start, when we see French paratroopers torturing an emaciated Algerian to discover the hiding place of his leader. He believes the cause of independence is just and must prevail. "Unless," as one of the rebel leaders says later in the film, "the army can change the course of history." But he also understands—and is willing to show—why the army will, or must, try.

What the film says to you will likely depend on what you already believe—about violence, colonialism, Arabs or even the French. But Mr. Pontecorvo will wreak havoc on your convictions along the way, presenting as basically decent human beings the ruthless antagonists on either side of a social struggle.

The story is told in a flashback, but not from a single viewpoint. We see the beginnings of the rebel organization in the casbah, its attempts to clean out the prostitutes, alcoholics and drug addicts, followed by persistent acts of violence against French military personnel. The French respond with a bomb which kills innocent people in the casbah and the rebels retaliate by sending their women into the European section to plant bombs in crowded public places. We watch this last sequence with the most incredible mixture of involvement and objectivity, first rooting for the women to carry out their mission, then recoiling as the camera introduces us to their victims—a child with an ice cream cone, teen-agers dancing the cha-cha to a jukebox.

When the French paratroopers enter the city to put down the rebellion, the narrator reminds us that the colonel who leads them (distinctively portrayed by Jean Martin) was a hero of the Resistance. "They call us fascists," he says later, "forgetting that some of us are survivors of Dachau and Buchenwald."

The colonel is questioned about his use of torture to get information. "If you want France to stay," he says, "you must accept the consequences."

If this film implies that violence is necessary to call attention to people's struggles for their rights, Pontecorvo also makes clear that violence leads to violence. But if you have to choose sides, does it really matter who struck first? Or do you just play follow the leader, whoever the leader may be?

Pontecorvo and his writing collaborator, Franco Solinas, don't answer these questions. Their document lays them out for consideration but never stacks the cards. The fact that *Algiers* has been banned in France and is unacceptable in Arab countries proves not only how well they have succeeded but how pertinent their examination of violence and the "acceptance of its consequences" can be for the rest of us.

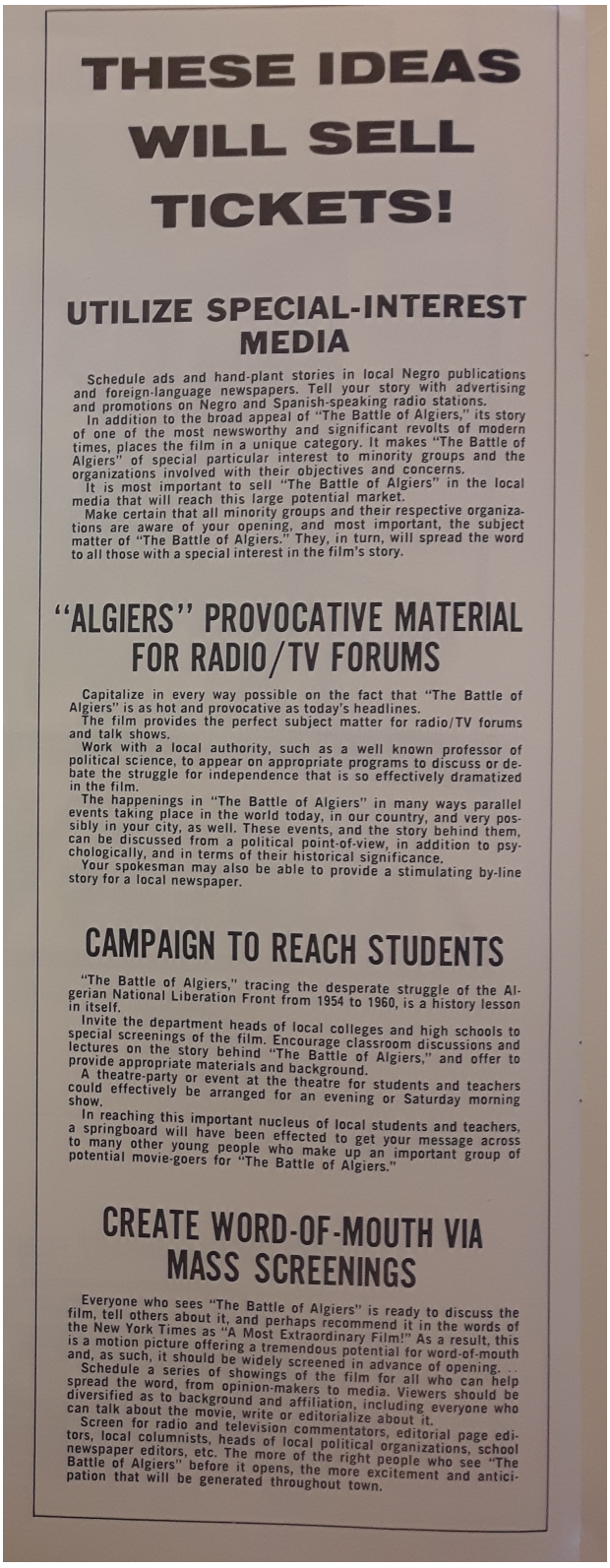
Mr. Rapf is a screenwriter, director and lecturer on film at Dartmouth.

—by Maurice Rapf

DISPLAY THIS EXCITING LIFE REVIEW!

40 x 60 BLOW-UP AVAILABLE FROM NATIONAL SCREEN SERVICE

Fig. 7. Re-print of Maurice Rapf's review of *The Battle of Algiers* for *Life* magazine featured in the Allied Artists campaign manual for the film. Allied Artists, "The Battle of Algiers Campaign Manual". 1968. Promotional Materials Collection. Harvard Film Archive. Houghton Library, Harvard University. Accessed: 16/05/2019



THESE IDEAS WILL SELL TICKETS!

UTILIZE SPECIAL-INTEREST MEDIA

Schedule ads and hand-plant stories in local Negro publications and foreign-language newspapers. Tell your story with advertising and promotions on Negro and Spanish-speaking radio stations.

In addition to the broad appeal of "The Battle of Algiers," its story of one of the most newsworthy and significant revolts of modern times, places the film in a unique category. It makes "The Battle of Algiers" of special particular interest to minority groups and the organizations involved with their objectives and concerns.

It is most important to sell "The Battle of Algiers" in the local media that will reach this large potential market.

Make certain that all minority groups and their respective organizations are aware of your opening, and most important, the subject matter of "The Battle of Algiers." They, in turn, will spread the word to all those with a special interest in the film's story.

"ALGIERS" PROVOCATIVE MATERIAL FOR RADIO/TV FORUMS

Capitalize in every way possible on the fact that "The Battle of Algiers" is as hot and provocative as today's headlines.

The film provides the perfect subject matter for radio/TV forums and talk shows.

Work with a local authority, such as a well known professor of political science, to appear on appropriate programs to discuss or debate the struggle for independence that is so effectively dramatized in the film.

The happenings in "The Battle of Algiers" in many ways parallel events taking place in the world today, in our country, and very possibly in your city, as well. These events, and the story behind them, can be discussed from a political point-of-view, in addition to psychologically, and in terms of their historical significance.

Your spokesman may also be able to provide a stimulating by-line story for a local newspaper.

CAMPAIGN TO REACH STUDENTS

"The Battle of Algiers," tracing the desperate struggle of the Algerian National Liberation Front from 1954 to 1960, is a history lesson in itself.

Invite the department heads of local colleges and high schools to special screenings of the film. Encourage classroom discussions and lectures on the story behind "The Battle of Algiers," and offer to provide appropriate materials and background.

A theatre-party or event at the theatre for students and teachers could effectively be arranged for an evening or Saturday morning show.

In reaching this important nucleus of local students and teachers, a springboard will have been effected to get your message across to many other young people who make up an important group of potential movie-goers for "The Battle of Algiers."

CREATE WORD-OF-MOUTH VIA MASS SCREENINGS

Everyone who sees "The Battle of Algiers" is ready to discuss the film, tell others about it, and perhaps recommend it in the words of the New York Times as "A Most Extraordinary Film!" As a result, this is a motion picture offering a tremendous potential for word-of-mouth and, as such, it should be widely screened in advance of opening. . .

Schedule a series of showings of the film for all who can help spread the word, from opinion-makers to media. Viewers should be diversified as to background and affiliation, including everyone who can talk about the movie, write or editorialize about it.

Screen for radio and television commentators, editorial page editors, local columnists, heads of local political organizations, school newspaper editors, etc. The more of the right people who see "The Battle of Algiers" before it opens, the more excitement and anticipation that will be generated throughout town.

Fig. 8. Promotional instructions for exhibitors featured in the Allied Artists campaign manual for *The Battle of Algiers*. Allied Artists, "The Battle of Algiers Campaign Manual". 1968. Promotional Materials Collection. Harvard Film Archive. Houghton Library, Harvard University. Accessed: 16/05/2019

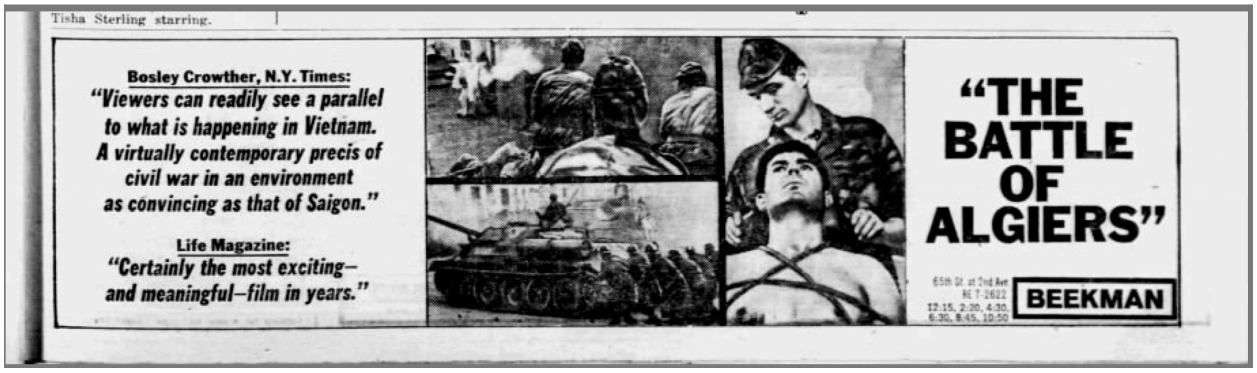


Fig. 9. An advertisement for *The Battle of Algiers* at the Beekman Theatre. "Advertisement". *The Daily News.* New York City, New York. 10 Nov. 1967. Newspapers Publisher Extra: Other Editions. p720. Accessed: 03/09/2018.

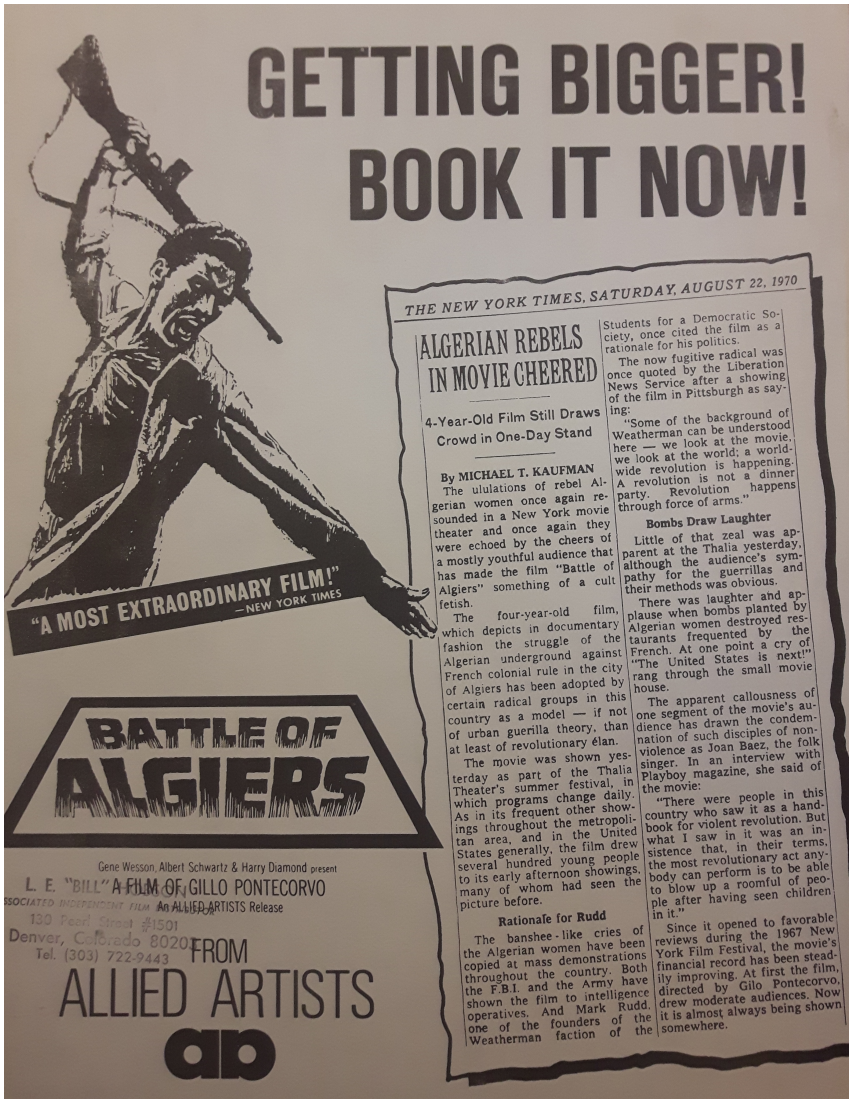


Fig. 10. An Allied Artists press release for *The Battle of Algiers.* Allied Artists, "Getting Bigger! Book it Now!" 1970. Promotional Materials Collection. Harvard Film Archive. Houghton Library, Harvard University. Accessed: 16/05/2019

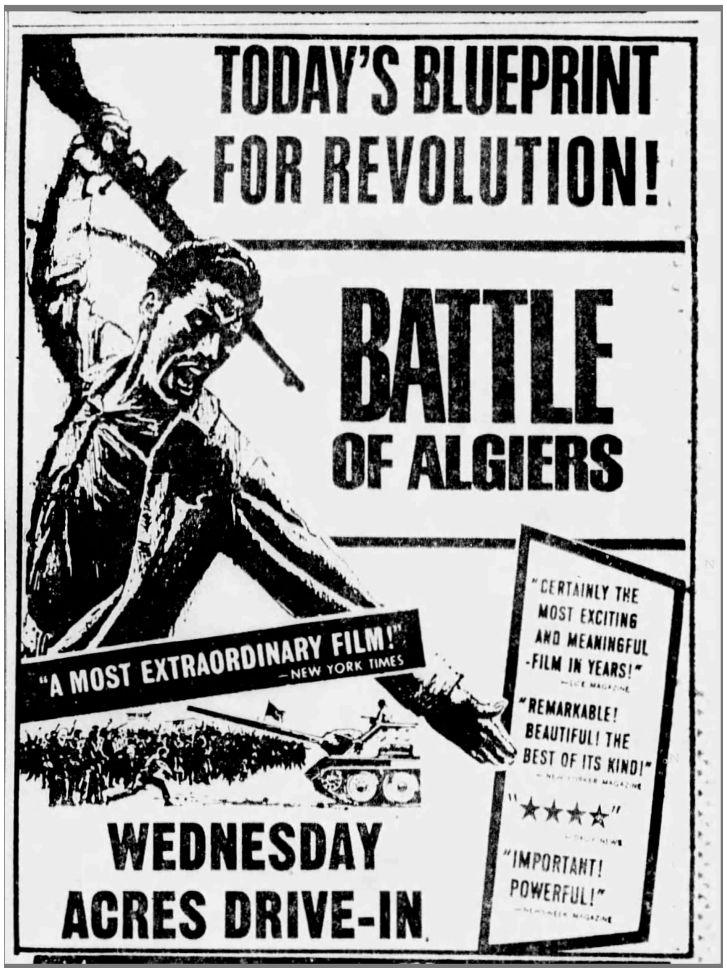


Fig. 11. An advertisement for *The Battle of Algiers*. "Advertisement". *The Arizona Republic*. 19 Oct. 1969. Newspapers Publisher Extra: Other Editions. p130. Accessed: 19/02/2019

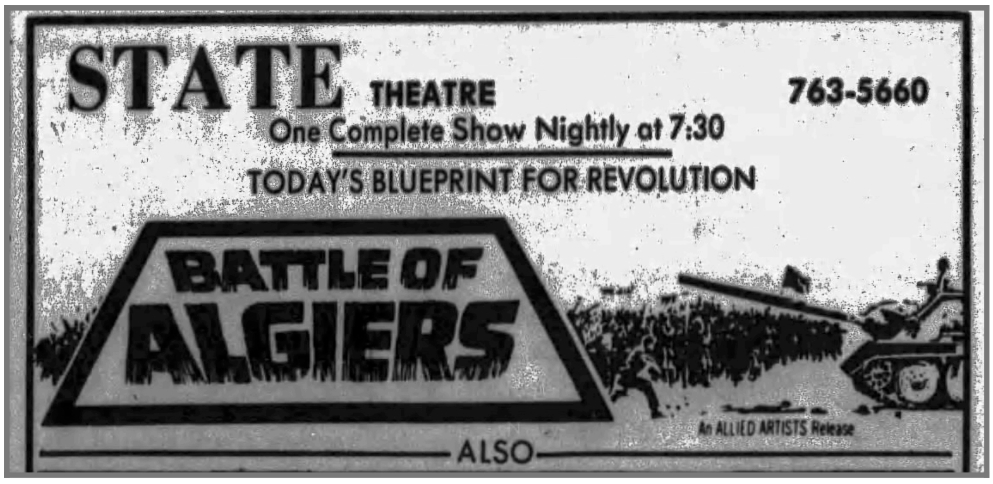


Fig. 12. An advertisement for *The Battle of Algiers*. "Advertisement". *The Petaluma Argus-Courier*. 22 Oct. 1969. Newspapers Publisher Extra: Other Editions. p2. Accessed: 19/02/2019.

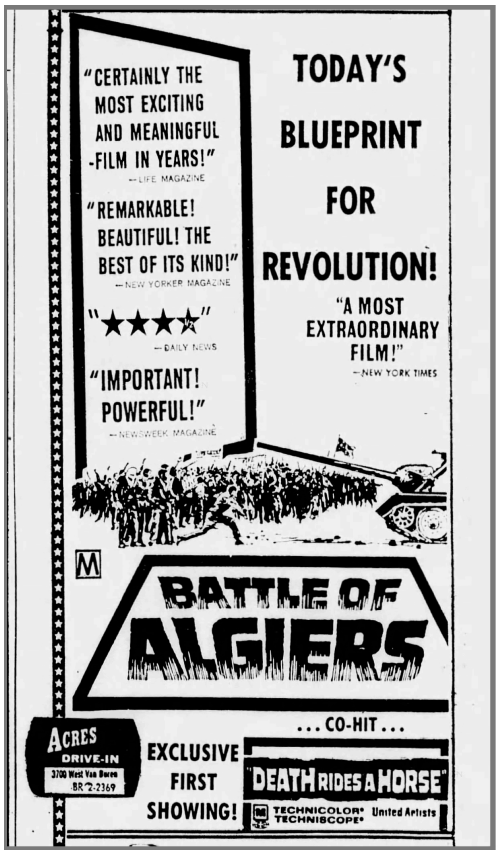


Fig. 13. An advertisement for *The Battle of Algiers.* "Advertisement". *The Arizona Republic.* 22 Oct. 1969. Newspapers Publisher Extra: Other Editions. p19. Accessed: 19/02/2019

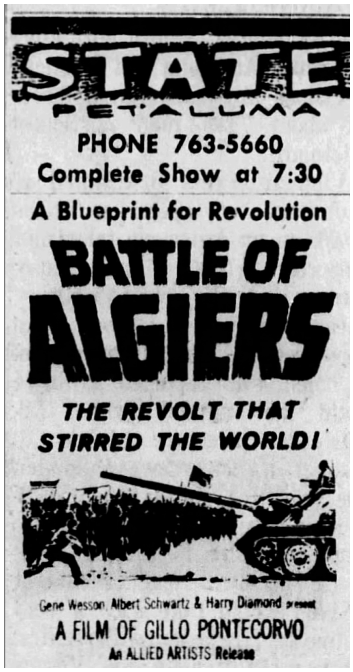


Fig. 14. An advertisement for *The Battle of Algiers.* "Advertisement". *The Press Democrat.* [Santa Rosa, California]. 26 Oct. 1969. Newspaper Publisher Extra: Other Editions. p2. Accessed 19/02/2019.

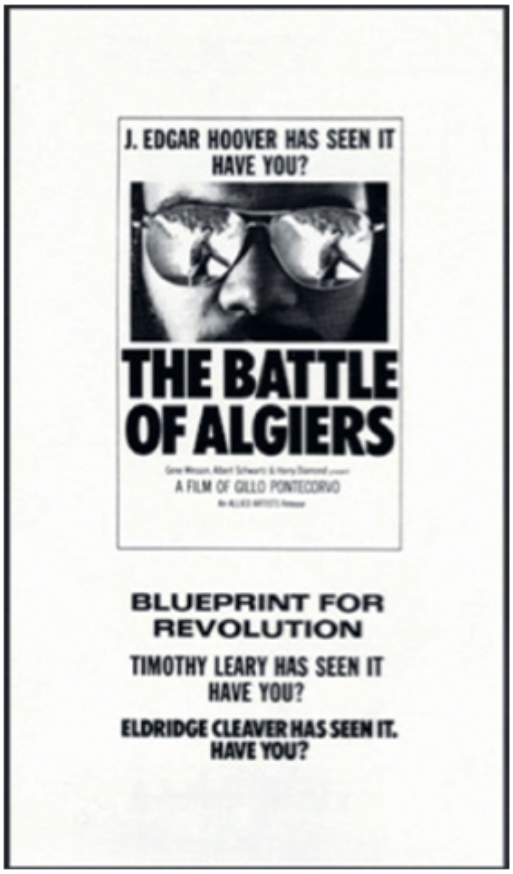


Fig. 15. An Allied Artists Poster for *The Battle of Algiers.* "Production Stills." *The Battle of Algiers*. Dir. Gillo Pontecorvo. Criterion Collection, 2004. DVD.

Fig. 16. An advertisement for *The Battle of Algiers.* "Advertisement". *The San Francisco Examiner.* 15 Sep. 1971. Newspaper Publisher Extra: Other Editions. p42. Accessed 19/02/2019.

Fig. 17. An advertisement for *The Battle of Algiers.* "Advertisement". *The San Francisco Examiner.* 14 Sep. 1971. Newspaper Publisher Extra: Other Editions. p29. Accessed 19/02/2019.

Fig. 18. An advertisement for *The Battle of Algiers.* "Advertisement" *The Los Angeles Times.* 31 Dec. 1969. Newspaper Publisher Extra: Other Editions. p6. Accessed: 14/11/2018.